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[Frontispiece: Miss Redmond detected a passage of glances between them.]

THE STOLEN SINGER

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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TO

MY HUSBAND

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ILLUSTRATIONS

THE STOLEN SINGER

CHAPTER I

TWILIGHT IN THE PARK

"You may wait, Renaud."

The voice was firm, but the lady herself hesitated as she stepped from the tonneau. There was no answer. Holding the flapping ends of her veil away from her face, she turned and looked fairly at the driver of the machine.

He seemed a businesslike, capable man, though certain minor details of his chauffeur's rig were a bit unusual, and now that he had been obliged, by some discomfort, to remove his goggles, his face appeared pleasant and quite untanned. His passenger noted these things, remarking: "Oh, it isn't Renaud!"

"No, Mademoiselle; Renaud hadn't showed up at the office when you telephoned, so they put

me on in his place."

"Ah, I see." Accent seemed to imply, however, that she was not quite pleased. "The manager sent you. And your name is—?"

"My name—rather odd name—Hand."

The face half hidden behind the veil remained impassive. A moment's hesitation, and then the lady turned away with a short, "You will wait?"

"As mademoiselle wishes. Or shall I perhaps follow slowly along the drive?"

"No, wait here. I shall return—soon."

The young woman walked away, erect, well-poised, lifting skirts skilfully as she paused a moment at the top of the stone steps leading down into the tiny park. The driver of the machine, free from observation, allowed a perplexed look to occupy his countenance. "What the devil is to pay if she doesn't return—*soon*!"

The avenue lifts a camel's hump toward the sky in the space of fifteen blocks, and on the top, secure as the howdah of a chieftain, stands the noble portico of the old college. To the westward, as every one knows, lie the river and the more pretentious park; on the east an abrupt descent offers space for a small grassy playground for children, who may be seen, during the sunny hours of the day, romping over the slope.

As the gaze of the woman swept over the charming little pleasance, and beyond, over the miles of sign-boards, roofs, chimneys, and intersecting streets, the serious look disappeared from her face. Summer haze and distance shed a gentle beauty over what she knew to be a clamoring city—New York. Angles were softened, noises subdued, sensational scenes lost in the dimmed perspective. To a chance observer, the prospect would have been deeply suggestive; in the woman it stirred many memories. She put back her veil; her face glowed; a long sigh escaped her lips. Slowly she walked down the steps, along the sloping path to a turn, where she sank down on a bench. A rosy, tired child, rather the worse for mud-pies, and hanging reluctantly at the hand of its nonchalant nurse, brought a bit of the woman's emotion to the surface. She smiled radiantly at the lagging infant.

The face revealed by the uplifted veil was of a type to accompany the youthful but womanly figure and the spirited tread. Beautiful she would be counted, without doubt, by many an observer; those who loved her would call her beautiful without stint. But more appealing than her beauty was the fine spirit—a strong, free spirit, loving honesty and courage—which glowed like a flame behind her beauty. Best of all, perhaps, was a touch of quaintness, a slightly comic twist to her lips, an imperceptible alertness of manner, which revealed to the initiated that she had a sense of humor in excellent running order.

It was evident that the little excursion was of the nature of a pilgrimage. The idle hour, the bit of holiday, became a memorial, as recollection brought back to her the days of childhood spent down yonder, a few squares away, in this very city. They seemed bright in retrospect, like the pleasant paths of a quiet garden, but they had ended abruptly, and had been followed by years of activity and colorful experience in another country. Through it all what anticipations had been lodged in her return to Home! Something there would complete the story—the story with its secret ecstasies and aspirations—the story of the ardent springs of youth.

Withdrawing her gaze from the scene below, though with apparent reluctance, she took from the pocket of her coat an opened envelope which she regarded a moment with thoughtfulness, before drawing forth the enclosures. There were two letters, one of which was brief and written in bad script on a single sheet of paper bearing a legal head. It was dated at Charlesport, Maine, and stated that the writer, in conformity with the last wish of his friend and client, Hercules Thayer, was ready to transfer certain deeds and papers to the late Mr. Thayer's designated heir, Agatha Redmond; also that the writer requested an interview at Miss Redmond's earliest convenience.

Holding the half-opened sheets in her hand, the lady closed her eyes and sat motionless, as if in the grasp of an absorbing thought. With the disappearing child, the signs of life on the hillside had diminished. The traffic of the street passed far below, the sharp click-click of a pedestrian now and then sounded above, but no one passed her way. The hum of the city made a blurred wash of sound, like the varying yet steady wash of the sea. As she opened her eyes again, she saw that the twilight had perceptibly deepened. Far away, lights began to flash out in the city, as if a million fireflies, by twos and threes and dozens, were waking to their nocturnal revelry.

On the hill the light was still good, and the lady turned again to her reading. The other letter was written on single sheets of thin paper in an old-fashioned, beautiful hand. Wherever a double-s occurred, the first was written long, in the style of sixty years ago; and the whole letter was as easily legible as print. Across the top was written: "To Agatha Redmond, daughter of my ward and dear friend, Agatha Shaw Redmond"; and below that, in the lawyer's choppy handwriting, was a date of nearly a year previous. As Agatha Redmond read the second letter, a smile, half of sadness, half of pleasure, overspread her countenance. It ran as follows:

"ILION, MAINE.

"MY DEAR AGATHA:

"I take my pen in hand to address you, the daughter of the dearest friend of my life, for the first time in the twenty-odd years of your existence. Once as a child you saw me, and you have doubtless heard my name from your mother's people from time to time; but I can scarcely hope that any knowledge of my private life has come to you. It will be easy, then, for you to pardon an old man for giving you, in this fashion, the confidence he has never been able to bestow in the flesh.

"When you read this epistle, my dear Agatha, I shall have stepped into that next mystery, which is Death. Indeed, the duty which I am now discharging serves as partial preparation for that very event. This duty is to make you heir to my house and estate and to certain accessory funds which will enable you to keep up the place.

"You may regard this act, possibly, as the idiosyncrasy of an unbalanced mind; it is certain that some of my kinsfolk will do so. But while I have been able to bear up under *their* greater or less displeasure for many years, I find myself shrinking before the possibility of dying absolutely unknown and forgotten by you. Your mother, Agatha Shaw, of blessed memory now for many years, was my ward and pupil after the death of your grandfather. I think I may say without undue self-congratulation that few women of their time have enjoyed as sound a scheme of education as your mother. She had a knowledge of mathematics, could construe both in Latin and Greek, and had acquired a fair mastery of the historic civilization of the Greeks, Egyptians and ancient Babylonians. While these attainments would naturally be insufficient for a man's work in life, yet for a woman they were of an exceptional order.

"Sufficient to say that in your mother's character these noteworthy abilities were supplemented by gracious, womanly arts; and when she arrived at maturity, I offered her the honor of marriage.

"It is painful for me to recall the scene and the consequences of your mother's refusal of my hand, even after these years of philosophical reflection. It were idle for a man of parts to allow a mere preference in regard to his domestic situation to influence his course of action in any essential matter, and I have never permitted my career to be shaped by such details. But from that time, however, the course of my life was changed. From the impassioned orator and preacher I was transformed into the man of books and the study, and since then I have lived far from the larger concourses of men. My weekly sermon, for twenty years, has been the essence of my weekly toil in establishing the authenticity, first, of the entire second gospel, and second, of the ten doubtful verses in the fifteenth chapter. My work is now accomplished—for all time, I believe.

"From the inception of what I considered my life mission, I made the resolve to bequeath to Agatha Shaw whatever manuscripts or other material of value my work should lead me to accumulate, together with this house, in which I have spent all the later years of my life. You are Agatha Shaw's only child, therefore to me a foster-child.

"Another reason, four years ago, led me to confirm my former testament. From time to time I have informed myself concerning your movements and fortunes. The work you have chosen, my dear Agatha, I can but believe to be fraught with unusual dangers to a young woman. Therefore I hope that this home, modest as it is, may tempt you to an early retirement from the stage, and lead you to a more private and womanly career. This I make only as a request, not as a condition. I bid you farewell, and give you my blessing.

"Faithfully yours,

"HERCULES THAYER."

Agatha Redmond folded the thin sheets carefully. There was a mist in her gaze as she looked off toward the distant city lights.

"Dear old gentleman! His whole love-story, and my mother's, too, perhaps!" Her quickened memory recalled childish impressions of a visit to a large country house and of a solemn old man—he seemed incredibly ancient to her—and of feeling that in some way she and her mother were in a special relationship to the house. It was called "the old red house," and was full of fascinating things. The ancient man had bidden her go about and play as if it were her home, and then had called her to him and laid open a book, leading her mind to regard its mysteries. Greek! It seemed to her as if she had begun it there and then. Later the mother became the teacher. She was nursed, as it were, within sight of the windy plains of Troy and to the sound of the Homeric hymns—and all by reason of this ancient scholar.

There was a vivid picture in her mind, gathered at some later visit, of a soft hillside, a small white church standing under its balm-of-gilead tree, and herself sitting by a stone in the old

churchyard, listening to the strains of a hymn which floated out from the high, narrow windows. She remembered how, from without, she had joined in the hymn, singing with all her small might; and suddenly the association brought back to her a more recent event and a more beautiful strain of music. Half in reverie, half in conscious pleasure in the exercise of a facile organ, she began to sing:

> "Free of my pain, free of my burden of sorrow,
> At last I shall see thee—"

The song floated in a zone of silence that lay above the deep-murmuring city. The voice was no more than the half-voice of a flute, sweet, gentle, beguiling. It told, as so many songs tell, of little earthly Love in the grasp of mighty Fate. Still she sang on, softly, as if loving the entrancing melody.

Suddenly the song ceased, and the reminiscent smile gave place to an expression of surprise, as the singer became conscious of a deeper shadow falling directly in front of her. She glanced up quickly, and found herself looking into the face of a man whose gimlet-like gaze was directed upon herself.

Quickly as she rose, she could not turn into the path before the gentleman, hat in hand, with a deep bow and clearly enunciated words, arrested her impulse to flight.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, I am a stranger in the city. I was directed this way to Van Cortlandt Hall, but I find I am in error, intrigued—in confusion. Would mademoiselle be so good as to direct me?"

The tones had a foreign accent. There was something, also, in their bland impertinence which put Miss Redmond on her guard. He was a good-sized, blond person, carefully dressed, and at least appeared like a gentleman.

Miss Redmond looked into the smooth, neat countenance, upon which no record either of experience or of thought was engraved, and decided fleetingly that he was lying. She judged him capable of picking up acquaintances on the street, but thought that more originality might be expected of him.

Suddenly she wished that she had returned sooner to her car, for though she was of an adventurous nature, her bravery was not of the physical order; and she disliked to have the appearance of unconventionality. After the first minute she was not so much afraid as annoyed. Her voice became frigid, though her dignity was somewhat damaged by the fact that she bungled in giving the desired information.

"I think monsieur will find Van Cortlandt Hall in the College grounds two blocks south—no, north—of the gateway yonder, at the upper end of this walk."

"Ah, mademoiselle is but too kind!" He bowed deeply again, hat still in hand. "I thank you profoundly. And may I say, also, that this wonderful picture—" here he spread eloquent hands toward the half-quiescent city whose thousand eyes glimmered over the lower distance—"this panorama of occidental life, makes a peculiar appeal to the imagination?"

The springs of emotion, touched potently as they had been by the surging recollections of the last half-hour, were faintly stirred again in Miss Redmond's heart by the stranger's grandiloquent words. Unconsciously her features relaxed, though she did not reply.

"Again I pray mademoiselle to pardon me, but only a moment past I heard the song—the song that might be the sigh of all the daughters of Italy. Ah, Mademoiselle, it is wonderful! But here in this so fresh country, this youthful, boisterous, too prosperous country, that song is like—like—like Arabian spices in a kitchen. Is it not so?"

Miss Redmond was moving up the steps toward the entrance, hesitating between the desire to snub her interlocutor and to avoid the appearance of fright. The man, meanwhile, moved easily beside her, courteously distant, discourteously insistent in his prattle. But the motor-car was now not far away.

The stranger looked appealingly at her, seemingly sure of a humorous answering look to his pleasantry. It was not wholly denied. She yielded to a touch of amusement with a cool smile, and hastened her steps. The man kept pace without effort. Luckily, the car stood only a few feet away, with Renaud, or rather Hand, at the curb, holding open the door. A vague bow and a lifting of the hat, and apparently the stranger went the other way. She felt a foolish relief, and at the same instant noted with surprise that the cover of her car had been raised.

"Why did you raise the top?"

"It appeared to me, Mademoiselle, that it was likely to rain."

"Put it down again. It will not rain," Miss Redmond was saying, when, from sidelong eyes, she saw that the stranger had not turned in the other direction, after all, but was almost in her

tracks, as though he were stalking game. With foot on the step she said sharply, but in a low voice, "To the Plaza quickly," then immediately added, with a characteristic practical turn: "But don't get yourself arrested for speeding."

"No, Mademoiselle, with this car I can make—" Even as the chauffeur replied, Miss Redmond's sharpened senses detected a passage of glances between him and the stranger, now close behind her.

She sprang into the tonneau and seized the door, but not before the man had caught at it with a stronger hold, and stepped in close after her. The chauffeur was in his seat, the car was moving slowly, now faster and faster. Suddenly the bland countenance slid very near her own, while firm hands against her shoulders crowded her into the farther corner of the tonneau.

"O Renaud—Hand!" she cried, but the driver made no sign. "Help, help!" she shrieked, but the cry was instantly choked into a feeble protest. A mass of something, pressed to her mouth and nostrils, incited her to superhuman efforts. She struggled frantically, fumbled at the door, tore at the curtain, and succeeded in getting her head for an instant at the opening, while she clutched her assailant and held him helpless. But only for a moment. The firm large hands quickly overpowered even the strength induced by frenzy, and in another minute she was lying unresisting on the soft cushions of the tonneau.

The car careened through the streets, the figure of the unresponsive Hand mocked her cries for help, the neat hard face of the stranger continued to bend over her. Then everything swam in a maelstrom of duller and duller sense, the world grew darker and fainter, till finally it was lost in silence.

CHAPTER II

HAMBLETON OF LYNN

The Hambletons of Lynn had not distinguished themselves, in late generations at least, by remarkable deeds, though their deportment was such as to imply that they could if they would. They frankly regarded themselves as the elect of earth, if not of Heaven, always, however, with a becoming modesty. Since 1636 the family had pieced out its existence in the New World, tenaciously clinging to many of its old-country habits. It had kept the *b* in the family name, for instance; it had kept the name itself out of trade, and it had indulged its love of country life at the expense of more than one Hambleton fortune.

A daughter-in-law was once reported as saying that it would have been a good thing if some Hambleton had embarked in trade, since in that case they might have been saved from devoting themselves exclusively to an illustration of polite poverty. She was never forgiven, and died without being reconciled to the family. As to the spelling of the name, the family claimed ancestral authority as far back as King Fergus the First. Mrs. Van Camp, a relative by marriage—a woman considered by the best Hambletons as far too frank and worldly-minded—informed the family that King Fergus was as much a myth as Dido, and innocently brought forth printed facts to corroborate her statement. One of the ladies Hambleton crushed Mrs. Van Camp by stating, in a tone of deep personal conviction, with her cap awry, "So much the worse for Dido!"

A salient strength persisted in the Hambletons—a strength which retained its character in spite of cross-currents. The Hambleton tone and the Hambleton ideas retained their family color, and became, whether worthily or not, a part of the Hambleton pride. More than one son had lost his health or entire fortune, which was apt not to be large, in attempts to carry on a country place. "A Hambleton trait!" they chuckled, with as much satisfaction as they considered it good form to exhibit. In Lynn, where family pride did not bring in large returns, this phrase became almost synonymous with genteel foolishness.

The Van Camp fortune, which came near but never actually into the family, was generally understood to have been made in shoes, though in reality it was drugs.

"People say 'shoes' the minute they hear the word Lynn, and I'm tired of explaining," Mrs. Van Camp put it. She was third in line from the successful druggist, and could afford, if anybody could, to be supercilious toward trade. But she wasn't, even after twenty years of somewhat restless submission to the Hambleton yoke. And it was she who, during her last visit to the family stronghold, held up before the young James the advantages of a commercial career.

"You're a nice boy, Jimsy, and I can't see you turned into a poor lawyer. You're not hard-headed enough to be a good one. As for being a minister, well—no. Go into business, dear boy, something substantial, and you'll live to thank your stars."

Jimsy received this advice at the time with small enthusiasm, and a reservation of criticism

that was a credit to his manners, at least. But the time came when he leaned on it.

Her own child, however, Mrs. Van Camp encouraged to a profession from the first. "Aleck isn't smart enough for business, but he may do something as a student," was Mrs. Van Camp's somewhat trying explanation; and Aleck did do something as a student. Extremely impatient with any exhibition of laziness, the mother demanded a good accounting of her son's time. Aleck and Jim, who were born in the same year, ran more or less side by side until the end of college. They struggled together in sports and in arguments, "rushed" the same girl in turn or simultaneously, and spent their long vacations cruising up and down the Maine coast in a thirty-foot sail-boat. Once they made a more ambitious journey all the way to Yarmouth and the Bay of Fundy in a good-sized fishing-smack.

But when college was done, their ways separated. Mrs. Van Camp, in the prime of her unusual faculties, died, having decorated the Hambleton 'scutcheon like a gay cockade stuck airily up into the breeze. She had no part nor lot in the family pride, but understood it, perhaps, better than the Hambletons themselves. Her crime was that she played with it. Aleck, a full-fledged biologist, went to the Little Hebrides to work out his fresh and salad theory concerning the nerve system of the clam.

James, third son of John and Edith Hambleton of Lynn, had his eyes thoroughly opened in the three months after Commencement by a consideration of the family situation. It seemed to him that from babyhood he had been burningly conscious of the pinching and skimping necessary to maintain the family pride. The two older brothers were exempt from the scorching process, the eldest being the family darling and the second a genius. Neither one could rationally be expected, "just at present," to take up the family accounts and make the income square up with even a decently generous outgo. And there were the girls yet to be educated. Jim had no special talent to bless himself with, either in art or science. He was inordinately fond of the sea, but that did not help him in choosing a career. He had good taste in books and some little skill in music. He was, indeed, thrall to the human voice, especially to the low voice in woman, and he was that best of all critics, a good listener. His greatest riches, as well as his greatest charm, lay in a spirit of invincible youth; but he was no genius, no one perceived that more clearly than himself.

So he remembered Clara Van Camp's advice, wrote the whole story to Aleck, and cast about for the one successful business chance in the four thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine bad ones—as the statistics have it.

He actually found it in shoes. Foot-ball muscle and grit went into the job of putting a superior shoe on an inferior foot, if necessary—at least on some foot. He got a chance to try his powers in the home branch of a manufacturing house, and made good. When he came to fill a position where there was opportunity to try new ideas, he tried them. He inspected tanneries and stockyards, he got composite measurements of all the feet in all the women's colleges in the year ninety-seven, he drilled salesmen and opened a night school for the buttonhole-makers, he made a scientific study of heels, and he invented an aristocratic arch and put it on the market.

The family joked about his doings as the harmless experiments of a lively boy, but presently they began to enjoy his income. Through it all they were affectionate and kind, with the matter-of-course fondness which a family gives to the member that takes the part of useful drudge. John, the pet of the parents, married, and had his own eyes opened, it is to be supposed. Donald, the genius, had just arrived, after a dozen years or so, at the stage where he was mentioned now and then in the literary journals. But Jim stuck to shoes and kept the family on a fair tide of modest prosperity.

Once, in the years of Jim's apprenticeship to life, there came over him a fit of soul-sickness that nearly proved his ruin.

"I can't stand this," he wrote Aleck Van Camp; "It's too hard and dry and sordid for any man that's got a soul. It isn't the grind I mind, though that is bad enough; it is the 'Commercial Idea' that eats into a man's innards. He forgets there are things that money can't buy, and in his heart he grows contemptuous of anything to be had 'without money and without price.' He can't help it. If he is thinking of trade nine-tenths of the time, his mind gets set that way. I'm ready any minute to jump the fence, like father's old colt up on the farm. I'm not a snob, but I recognize now that there was some reason for all our old Hambleton ancestors being so finicky about trade.

"Do you remember how we used to talk, when we were kiddies, about keeping our ideals? Well, I believe I'm bankrupt, Aleck, in my account with ideals. I don't want to howl, and these remarks don't go with anybody else, but I can say, to you, I want them back again."

Aleck did as a kiddie should do, writing much advice on long sheets of paper, and illustrating his points richly, like a good Scotchman, with scientific instances. A month or two later he contrived to have work to do in Boston, so that he could go out to Lynn and look up Jimmy's case. He even devised a cure by creating, in his mind, an office in the biological world which was to be offered to James on the ground that science needed just his abilities and training. But when Aleck arrived in Lynn he found that Jim, in some fashion or other, had found a cure for himself. He was deeper than ever in the business, and yet, in some spiritual sense, he had found himself. He had captured his ideal again and yoked it to duty—which is a great feat.

After twelve years of ferocious labor, with no vacations to speak of, James's mind took a turn for the worse. Physically he was as sound as a bell, though of a lath-like thinness; but an effervescing in his blood lured his mind away from the study of lasts and accounts and Parisian models and sent it careering, like Satan, up and down the earth. Romance, which had been drugged during the transition from youth to manhood, awoke and coaxed for its rights, and whispered temptingly in an ear not yet dulled to its voice. Freedom, open spaces, laughter, the fresh sweep of the wind, the high bucaneering piracy of life and joy—these things beglamoured his senses.

So one day he locked his desk with a final click. The business was in good shape. It is but justice to say that if it had not been, Romance had dangled her luring wisp o' light in vain. Several of his new schemes had worked out well, his subordinates were of one mind with him, trade was flourishing. He felt he could afford a little spin.

Jimsy's radiating fancies focussed themselves, at last, on the vision of a trig little sail-boat, "a jug of wine, a loaf of bread" in the cabin, with possibly the book of verses underneath the bow, or more suitably, in the shadow of the sail; and Aleck Van Camp and himself astir in the rigging or plunging together from the gunwale for an early swim. "And before I get off, I'll hear a singer that can sing," he declared.

He telegraphed Aleck, who was by this time running down the eyelid of the squid, to meet him at his club in New York. Then he made short work with the family. Experience had taught him that an attack from ambush was most successful.

"Look here, Edith,"—this was at the breakfast-table the very morning of his departure. Edith was sixteen, the tallest girl in the academy, almost ready for college and reckoned quite a queen in her world—"You be good and do my chores for me while I'm away, and I'll bring you home a duke. Take care of mother's bronchitis, and keep the house straight. I'm going on a cruise."

"All right, Jim"—Edith could always be counted on to catch the ball—"go ahead and have a bully time and don't drown yourself. I'll drive the team straight to water, mother and dad and the whole outfit, trust me!"

Considering the occasion and the correctness of the sentiments, Jim forbore, for once, from making the daily suggestion that she chasten her language. By the time the family appeared, Jim had laid out a rigid course of action for Miss Edith, who rose to the occasion like a soldier.

"Mother'll miss you, of course, but Jack and Harold"—two of Edith's admirers—"Jack and Harold can come around every day—stout arm to lean upon, that sort of thing. You know mother can't be a bit jolly without plenty of men about, and since Sue became engaged she really doesn't count. The boys will think *they* are running things, of course, but they'll see my iron hand in the velvet glove—you can throw a blue chip on that, Jimsy. And don't kiss me, Jim, for Dorothy Snell and I vowed, when we wished each other's rings on—Oh, well, brothers don't count."

And so, amid the farewells of a tender, protesting family, he got off, leaving Edith in the midst of one of her monologues.

There was a telegram in New York saying that Aleck Van Camp would join him in three days, at the latest. Hambleton disliked the club and left it, although his first intention had been to put up there. He picked out a modest, up-town hotel, new to him, for no other reason than that it had a pretty name, The Larue. Then he began to consider details.

The day after his arrival was occupied in making arrangements for his boat. He put into this matter the same painstaking buoyancy that he had put into a dull business for twelve years. He changed his plans half a dozen times, and exceeded them wholly in the size and equipment of the little vessel, and in the consequent expense; but he justified himself, as men will, by a dozen good reasons. The trig little sail-boat turned out to be a respectable yacht, steam, at that. She was called the *Sea Gull*. Neat in the beam, stanch in the bows, rigged for coasting and provided with a decent living outfit, she was "good enough for any gentleman," in the opinion of the agent who rented her. Jim was half ashamed at giving up the more robust scheme of sailing his own boat, with Aleck; but some vague and expansive spirit moved him "to see," as he said, "what it would be like to go as far and as fast as we please." While they were about it, they would call on some cousins at Bar Harbor and get good fun out of it.

The idea of his holiday grew as he played with it. As his spin took on a more complicated character, his zest rose. He went forth on Sunday feeling as if some vital change was impending. His little cruise loomed up large, important, epochal. He laughed at himself and thought, with his customary optimism, that a vacation was worth waiting twelve years for, if waiting endowed it with such a flavor. Jim knew that Aleck would relish the spin, too. Aleck's nature was that of a grind tempered with sportiness. Jim sat down Sunday morning and wrote out the whole program for Aleck's endorsement, sent the letter by special delivery and went out to reconnoiter.

The era of Sunday orchestral concerts had begun, but that day, to Jim's regret, the singer was not a contralto. "Dramatic Soprano" was on the program; a new name, quite unknown to Jim. His interest in the soloist waned, but the orchestra was enough. He thanked Heaven that he was past the primitive stage of thinking any single voice more interesting than the assemblage of

instruments known as orchestra.

Hambleton found a place in the dim vastness of the hall, and sank into his seat in a mood of vivid anticipation. The instruments twanged, the audience gathered, and at last the music began. Its first effect was to rouse Hambleton to a sharp attention to details—the director, the people in the orchestra, the people in the boxes; and then he settled down, thinking his thoughts. The past, the future, life and its meaning, love and its power, the long, long thoughts of youth and ambition and desire came flocking to his brain. The noble confluence of sound that is music worked upon him its immemorial miracle; his heart softened, his imagination glowed, his spirit stirred. Time was lost to him—and earth.

The orchestra ceased, but Hambleton did not heed the commotion about him. The pause and the fresh beginning of the strings scarcely disturbed his ecstatic reverie. A deep hush lay upon the vast assemblage, broken only by the voices of the violins. And then, in the zone of silence that lay over the listening people—silence that vibrated to the memory of the strings—there rose a little song. To Hambleton, sitting absorbed, it was as if the circuit which galvanized him into life had suddenly been completed. He sat up. The singer's lips were slightly parted, and her voice at first was no more than the half-voice of a flute, sweet, gentle, beguiling. It was borne upward on the crest of the melody, fuller and fuller, as on a flooding tide.

"Free of my pain, free of my burden of sorrow,
At last I shall see thee—"

There was freedom in the voice, and the sense of space, of wind on the waters, of life and the love of life.

Jimsy was a soft-hearted fellow. He never knew what happened to him; but after uncounted minutes he seemed to be choking, while the orchestra and the people in boxes and the singer herself swam in a hazy distance. He shook himself, called somebody he knew very well an idiot, and laughed aloud in his joy; but his laugh did not matter, for it was drowned in the roar of applause that reached the roof.

Jim did not applaud. He went outdoors to think about it; and after a time he found, to his surprise, that he could recall not only the song, but the singer, quite distinctly. It was a tall, womanly figure, and a fair, bright face framed abundantly with dark hair, and the least little humorous twitch to her lips. And her name was Agatha Redmond.

"Of course, she can sing; but it isn't like having the real thing—'tisn't an alto," said Jimsy ungratefully and just from habit.

The day's experience filled his thoughts and quieted his restlessness. He awaited Aleck with entire patience. Monday morning he spent in small necessary business affairs, securing, among other things, several hundred dollars, which he put in his money-belt. About the middle of the afternoon he left his hotel, engaged a taxicab and started for Riverside. The late summer day was fine, with the afternoon haze settling over river and town. He watched the procession of carriages, the horse-back riders, the people afoot, the children playing on the grass, with a feeling of comradeship. Was he not also tasting freedom—a lord of the earth? His gaze traveled out to the river, with the glimmer here and there of a tug-boat, a little steamer, or the white sail of a pleasure craft. The blood of some seagoing ancestor stirred in his veins, and he thrilled at the thought of the days to come when his prow should be headed offshore.

The taxicab had its limitations, and Hambleton suddenly became impatient of its monotonous slithering along the firm road. Telling the driver to follow him, he descended and crossed to where Cathedral Parkway switches off. He walked briskly, feeling the tonic of the sea air, and circled the cathedral, where workmen were lounging away after their day's toil. The unfinished edifice loomed up like a giant skeleton of some prehistoric era, and through its mighty open arches and buttresses Jim saw fleecy clouds scudding across the western sky, A stone saint, muffled in burlap, had just been swung up into his windy niche, but had not yet discarded his robes of the world. Hambleton was regarding the shapeless figure with mild interest, wondering which saint of the calendar could look so grotesque, when a sound drew his attention sharply to earth. It was a small sound, but there was something strange about it. It was startling as a flash in a summer sky.

Besides the workmen, there was no living thing in sight on the hillside except his own taxicab, swinging slowly into the avenue at that moment, and a covered motor-car getting up speed a square away. Even as the car approached, Hambleton decided that the strange sound had proceeded from its ambushed tonneau; and it was, surely, a human voice of distress. He stepped forward to the curb. The car was upon him, then lumbered heavily and swiftly past. But on the instant of its passing there appeared, beneath the lifted curtain and quite near his own face, the face of the singer of yesterday; and from pale, agonized lips, as if with, dying breath, she cried, "Help, help!"

Hambleton knew her instantly, although the dark abundance of her hair was almost lost

beneath hat and flowing veil, and the bright, humorous expression was blotted out by fear. He stood for a moment rooted to the curb, watching the dark mass of the car as it swayed down the hill. Then he beckoned sharply to his driver, met the taxicab half way, and pointed to the disappearing machine.

"Quick! Can you overtake it?"

"I'd like nothing better than to run down one o' them Dook machines!" said the driver.

CHAPTER III

MIDSUMMER MADNESS

The driver of the taxicab proved to be a sound sport.

Five minutes of luck, aided by nerve, brought the two machines somewhat nearer together. The motor-car gained in the open spaces, the taxicab caught up when it came to weaving its way in and out and dodging the trolleys. At the frequent moments when he appeared to be losing the car, Hambleton reflected that he had its number, which might lead to something. At the Waldorf the car slowed up, and the cab came within a few yards. Hambleton made up his mind at that instant that he had been mistaken in his supposition of trouble threatening the lady, and looked momently to see her step from the car into the custody of those starched and lacquered menials who guard the portals of fashionable hotels.

But it was not so. A signal was interchanged between the occupants of the car and some watcher in the doorway, and the car sped on. Hambleton, watching steadily, wondered!

"If she is being kidnapped, why doesn't she make somebody hear? Plenty of chance. They couldn't have killed her—that isn't done."

And yet his heart smote him as he remembered the terror and distress written on that countenance and the cry for help.

"Something was the matter," memory insisted. "There they go west; west Tenth, Alexander Street, Tenth Avenue—"

The car lumbered on, the cab half a block, often more, in the rear, through endless regions of small shops and offices huddled together above narrow sidewalks, through narrow and winding streets paved with cobblestones and jammed with cars and trucks, squeezing past curbs where dirty children sat playing within a few inches of death-dealing wheels. Hambleton wondered what kept them from being killed by hundreds daily, but the wonder was immediately forgotten in a new subject for thought. The cab had stopped, although several yards of clear road lay ahead of it. The driver was climbing down. The motor-car was nosing its way along nearly a block ahead. Hambleton leaped out.

"Of course, we've broken down?" he mildly inquired. Deep in his heart he was superstitiously thinking that he would let fate determine his next move; if there were obstacles in the way of his further quest, well and good; he would follow the Face no longer.

"If you'll wait just a minute—" the driver was saying, "until I get my kit out—"

But Hambleton, looking ahead, saw that the car had disappeared, and his mind suddenly veered.

"Not this time," he announced. "Here, the meter says four-twenty—you take this, I'm off." He put a five-dollar bill into the hand of the driver and started on an easy run toward the west.

He had caught sight of smoke-stacks and masts in the near distance, telling him that the motor-car had almost, if not quite, reached the river. Such a vehicle could not disappear and leave no trace; it ought to be easy to find. Ahead of him flaring lights alternated with the steady, piercing brilliance of the incandescents, and both struggled against the lingering daylight.

A heavy policeman at the corner had seen the car. He pointed west into the cavernous darkness of the wharves.

"If she ain't down at the Imperial docks she's gone plump into the river, for that's the way she went," he insisted. The policeman had the bearing of a major-general and the accent of the city of Cork. Hambleton went on past the curving street-car tracks, dodged a loaded dray emerging from the dock, and threaded his way under the shed. He passed piles of trunks, and a couple of truckmen dumping assorted freight from an ocean liner. No motor-car or veiled lady, nor sound of anything like a woman's voice. Hambleton came out into the street again, looked about for

another probable avenue of escape for the car and was at the point of bafflement, when the major-general pounded slowly along his way.

"In there, my son, and no nice place either!" pointing to a smaller entrance alongside the Imperial docks, almost concealed by swinging signs. It was plainly a forbidden way, and at first sight appeared too narrow for the passage of any vehicle whatsoever. But examination showed that it was not too narrow; moreover, it opened on a level with the street.

"If you really want her, she's in there, though what'll be to pay if you go in there without a permit, I don't know. I'd hate to have to arrest you."

"It might be the best thing for me if you did, but I'm going in. You might wait here a minute. Captain, if you will."

"I will that; more especially as that car was a stunner for speed and I already had my eye on her. I'd like to see you fish her out of that hole."

But Hambleton was out of earshot and out of sight. An empty passage smelling of bilge-water and pent-up gases opened suddenly on to the larger dock. Damp flooring with wide cracks stretched off to the left; on the right the solid planking terminated suddenly in huge piles, against which the water, capped with scum and weeds, splashed fitfully. The river bank, lined with docks, seemed lulled into temporary quietness. Ferry-boats steamed at their labors farther up and down the river, but the currents of travel left here and there a peaceful quarter such as this.

Hambleton's gaze searched the dock and the river in a rapid survey. The dock itself was dim and vast, with a few workmen looking like ants in the distance. It offered nothing of encouragement; but on the river, fifty yards away, and getting farther away every minute, was a yacht's tender. The figures of the two rowers were quite distinct, their oars making rhythmical flashes over the water, but it was impossible to say exactly what freight, human or otherwise, it carried. It was evident that there were people aboard, possibly several. Even as Hambleton strained his eyes to see, the outlines of the rowboat merged into the dimness. It was pointed like a gun toward a large yacht lying at anchor farther out in the stream. The vessel swayed prettily to the current, and slowly swung its dim light from the masthead.

"They've got her—out in that boat," said Hambleton to himself, feeling, while the words were on his lips, that he was drawing conclusions unwarranted by the evidence. Thus he stood, one foot on the slippery log siding of the dock, watching while the little drama played itself out, so far as his present knowledge could go. His judgment still hung in suspense, but his senses quickened themselves to detect, if possible, what the outcome might be. He saw the tender approach the boat, lie alongside; saw one sailor after another descend the rope ladder, saw a limp, inert mass lifted from the rowboat and carried up, as if it had been merchandise, to the deck of the yacht; saw two men follow the limp bundle over the gunwale; and finally saw the boat herself drawn up and placed in her davits. Hambleton's mind at last slid to its conclusion, like a bolt into its socket.

"They're kidnapping her, without a doubt," he said slowly. For a moment he was like one struck stupid. Slowly he turned to the dock, looking up and down its orderly but unprepossessing clutter. Dim lights shone here and there, and a few hands were at work at the farther end. The dull silence, the unresponsive preoccupation of whatever life was in sight, made it all seem as remote from him and from this tragedy as from the stars.

In fact, it was impersonal and remote to such a degree that Hambleton's practical mind, halted yet an instant, in doubt whether there were not some plausible explanation. The thought came back to him suddenly that the motor-car must be somewhere in the neighborhood if his conclusion were correct.

On the instant his brain became active again. It did not take long, as a matter of fact, to find the car; though when he stumbled on it, turned about and neatly stowed away close beside the partitioning wall, he gave a start. It was such a tangible evidence of what had threatened to grow vague and unreal on his hands. He squeezed himself into the narrow space between it and the wall, finally thrusting his head under the curtains of the tonneau.

It was high and dry, empty as last year's cockleshell. Not a sign of life, not a loose object of any kind except a filmy thing which Hambleton found himself observing thoughtfully. At last he picked it up—a long, mist-like veil. He spread it out, held it gingerly between a thumb and finger of each hand, and continued to look at it abstractedly. Part of it was clean and whole, dainty as only a bit of woman's finery can be; but one end of it was torn and twisted and stretched out of all semblance to itself. Moreover, it was dirty, as if it had been ground under a muddy heel. It was, in its way, a shrieking evidence of violence, of unrighteous struggle. Hambleton folded the scarf carefully, with its edges together, and put it in his pocket. Jimmy's actions from this time on had an incentive and a spirit that had before been lacking. He noted again the number of the car, and returned to the edge of the dock to observe the yacht. She had steamed up river a little way for some reason known only to herself, and was now turning very slowly. She was but faintly lighted, and would pass for some pleasure craft just coming home. But Jim knew better. He could, at last, put two and two together. He would follow the Face—indeed, he could not help following it. In him had begun that divine experience of youth—of youth essentially, whether it come in early years or late—of being carried off his feet by a spirit not himself. He ran like a young athlete

down the dock to the nearest workman, evolving schemes as he went.

The dock-hand apathetically trundled a small keg from one pile of freight to another, wiped his hands on his trousers, took a dry pipe out of his pocket, and looked vacantly up the river before he replied to Hambleton's question.

"Queer name—*Jene Dark* they call her."

It was like pulling teeth to get information out of him, but Jim applied the forceps.

The yacht had been lying out in the river for two weeks or more, possibly less; belonged to foreign parts; no one thereabouts knew who its owner was; nor its captain; nor its purpose in the harbor of New York. At last, quite gratuitously, the man volunteered a personal opinion. "Slippery boat in a gale—wouldn't trust her."

Hambleton walked smartly back, taking a look both at the yacht and the motor-car as he went. The yacht's nose pointed toward the Jersey shore; the car was creeping out of the dock. As he overtook the machine, he saw that it was in the hands of a mechanic in overalls and jumper. In answer to Hambleton's question as, to the owner of the car, the mechanic told him pleasantly to go to the devil, and for once the sight of a coin failed to produce any perceptible effect. But the major-general, waiting half a block away, was still in the humor of giving fatherly advice. He welcomed Jim heartily. "That's a hole I ain't got no use for. 'Ow'd you make out?"

"Well enough, for all present purposes. Can you undertake to do a job for me?"

"If it ain't nothing I'd have to arrest you for, I might consider it," he chuckled.

"I want you to go to the Laramie Club and tell Aleck Van Camp—got the name?—that Hambleton has gone off on the *Jeanne D'Arc* and may not be back for some time; and he is to look after the *Sea Gull*."

"Hold on, young man; you're not going to do anything out of reason, as one might say?"

"Oh, no, not at all; most reasonable thing in the world. You take this money and be sure to get the message to Mr. Van Camp, will you? All right. Now tell me where I can find a tug-boat or a steam launch, quick."

"O'Leary, down at pier X—2—O has launches and everything else. All right, my son, Aleck Van Camp, at the Laramie. But you be good and don't drown yourself."

This last injunction, word for word in the manner of the pert Edith, touched Jimmy's humor. He laughed ringingly. His spirit was like a chime of bells on a week-day.

The hour which followed was one that James Hambleton found it difficult to recall afterward, with any degree of coherence; but at the time his movements were mathematically accurate, swift, effective. He got aboard a little steam tug and followed the yacht down the river and into the harbor. As she stood out into the roads and began to increase her speed, he directed the captain of the tug to steam forward and make as if to cross her bows. This would make the pilot of the yacht angry, but he would be forced to slow down a trifle. Jim watched long enough to see the success of his manoeuver, then went down into the cuddy which served as a cabin, took off most of his clothes, and looked to the fastenings of his money belt. Then he watched his chance, and when the tug was pretty nearly in the path of the yacht, he crept to the stern and dropped overboard.

CHAPTER IV

MR. VAN CAMP MAKES A CALL

Aleck Van Camp turned from the clerk's desk, rather relieved to find that Hambleton had not yet made his appearance. Aleck had an errand on his mind, and he reflected that Jim was apt to be impetuous and reluctant to await another man's convenience; at least, Jim wouldn't perceive that another man's convenience needed to be waited for; and Aleck had no mind to announce this errand from the housetops. It was not a business that pertained, directly, either to the *Sea Gull* or to the coming cruise.

He made an uncommonly careful toilet, discarding two neckties before the operation was finished. When all was done the cravat presented a stuffed and warped appearance which was not at all satisfying, even to Aleck's uncritical eye; but the tie was the last of his supply and was, perhaps, slightly better than none at all.

Dinner at the club was usually a dull affair, and to Mr. Van Camp, on this Monday night, it

seemed more stupid than ever. The club had been organized in the spirit of English clubs, with the unwritten by-law of absolute and inviolable privacy for the individual. No wild or woolly manners ever entered those decorous precincts. No slapping on the shoulder, no hail-fellow greetings, no chance dinner companionship ever dispelled the awful penumbra of privacy that surrounded even the humblest member. A man's eating and drinking, his coming or going, his living or dying, were matters only for club statistics, not for personal inquiry or notice.

The result of this habitual attitude on the part of the members of the club and its servants was an atmosphere in which a cataleptic fit would scarcely warrant unofficial interference; much less would merely mawkish or absent-minded behavior attract attention. That was the function of the club—to provide sanctuary for personal whims and idiosyncrasies; of course, always within the boundaries of the code.

On the evening in question Mr. Van Camp did not actually become silly, but his manner lacked the poise and seriousness which sophisticated men are wont to bring to the important event of the day. He was as near being nervous as a Scotch-American Van Camp could be; and at the same time he felt an unwonted flow of life and warmth in his cool veins. He went so far as to make a remark to the waiter which he meant for an affable joke, and then wanted to kick the fellow for taking it so solemnly.

"You mind yourself, George, or they'll make you abbot of this monastery yet!" said Aleck, as George helped him on with his evening coat.

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," said George.

He left word at the office that in case any one called he was to be informed that Mr. Van Camp would return to the club for the night; then, in his silk hat and generally shining togs, he set forth to make a call. He was no stranger to New York, and usually he took his cities as they came, with a matter-of-fact nonchalance. He would be as much at home on his second day in London as he had ever been in Lynn; or he would go from a friend's week-end house-party, where the habits of a Sybarite were forced on him, to a camp in the woods and pilot-bread fare, with an equal smoothness of temper and enjoyment. Since luxury made no impression on him, and hardship never blunted his own ideals of politeness or pleasure, no one ever knew which life he preferred.

Choosing to walk the fifteen or twenty squares to the Archangel apartment house, his destination, Van Camp looked about him, on this night of his arrival, with slightly quickened perceptions. He cast a mildly appreciative eye toward the picture disclosed here and there by the glancing lights, the chiaroscuro of the intersecting streets, the constantly changing vistas. For an unimpressionable man, he was rather wrought upon. Nevertheless, he entered the charming apartment whither he was bound with the detached and composed manner which society regards as becoming. A maid with a foreign accent greeted him. Yes, Mademoiselle Reynier was at home; Mr. Van Camp would find her in the drawing-room.

The stiff and unrelaxed manner with which Mr. Van Camp bowed to Miss Reynier a moment later was not at all indicative of the fairly respectable fever within his Scotch breast. Miss Reynier herself was pretty enough to cause quickened pulses. She was of noble height, evidently a woman of the world. She gave Mr. Van Camp her hand in a greeting mingled of European daintiness and American frankness. Her vitality and abounding interest in life were manifest.

"Ah, but you are very late. This is how you become smart all at once in your New York atmosphere! But pray be seated; and here are cigarettes, if you will. No? Very well; but tell me; has that amorphous gill-slit—oh, no, the *branchial lamella*—has it behaved itself and proved to be the avenue which shall lead you to fame?"

Mr. Van Camp stood silent through this flippant badinage, and calmly waited until Miss Reynier had settled herself. Then he thoughtfully turned the chair offered him so as to command a slightly better view of the corner where she sat, leaning against the old-rose cushions. Finally, taking his own time, he touched off her greeting with his precise drawl.

"I'm not smart, as you call it, even in New York, though I try to be." His eyes twinkled and his teeth gleamed in his wide smile. "If I were smart, I'd pass by your error in scientific nomenclature, but really I ought not to do it. If one can not be exact—"

"That's just what I say. If one can not be exact, why talk at all?" Miss Reynier caught it up with high glee. She had a foreign accent, and an occasional twist of words which proved her to be neither American nor Englishwoman. "That's my principle," she insisted. "Leave other people in undisturbed possession of their hobbies, especially in conversation, and don't say anything if you can't say what you mean. But then, *you* won't talk about your hobby; and if I have no one to inform me, how can I be exact? But I'm the meekest person alive; I'm so ready to learn."

Mr. Van Camp surveyed first the bantering, alluring eyes, then turned his gaze upon the soft luxuries about them.

"Are you ready to turn this bijou dream into a laboratory smelling of alcohol and fish? Are you ready to spend hours wading in mudbanks after specimens, or scratching in the sand under the broiling sun? Science does not consult comfort."

Miss Reynier's expression of quizzical teasing changed to one of rather thoughtful inquiry, as if she were estimating the man behind the scientist. Van Camp was of the lean, angular type, like Jim Hambleton. He was also very manly and wholesome, but even in his conventional evening clothes there was something about him that was unconventional—a protesting, untamed element of character that resisted all rules except those prescribed by itself. He puzzled her now, as he had often puzzled her before; but if she made fun of his hobbies, she had no mind to make fun of the man himself. A cheerful, intelligent smile finally ended her contemplating moment.

"Oh, no; no digging in the sand for me. I'll take what science I get in another way—put up in predigested packages or bottled—any way but the fishy way. But please don't give me up. You shed a good deal of light on my mental darkness last winter in Egypt, and maybe I can improve still more." She suddenly turned with friendly, confidential manner toward Aleck, not waiting for replies to her remarks. "It's good to see you again! And I like it here better than in Egypt, don't you? Don't you think this apartment jolly?"

The shaded lamps made a pretty light over Miss Reynier's cream-colored silk flounces, over the delicate lace on her waist, over her glossy dark hair and spirited face. As Aleck contemplated that face, with its eager yet modest and womanly gaze, and the noble outline of her figure, he thought, with an unwonted flowering of imagination, that she was not unlike the Diana of classic days. "A domestic Diana," he added in his mind. "She may love the woods and freedom, but she will always return to the hearth."

Aloud he said: "If you will permit me, Miss Reynier, I would like to inform you at once of the immediate object of my visit here. You must be well aware—" At this point Mr. Van Camp, who, true to his nature, was looking squarely in the face of his companion, of necessity allowed himself to be interrupted by Miss Reynier's lifted hand. She was looking beyond her visitor through the drawing-room door.

"Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Lloyd-Jones," announced the servant.

As Miss Reynier swept forward with outstretched hand to greet the new-comers, Van Camp fixed his eyes on his hostess with a mingled expression of masculine rage and submission. Whether he thought her too cordial toward the other men or too cool toward himself, was not apparent. Presently he, too, was shaking hands with the visitors, who were evidently old friends of the house. Madame Reynier, the aunt of mademoiselle, was summoned, and Van Camp was marooned on a sofa with Lloyd-Jones, who was just in from the West. Aleck found himself listening to an interminable talk about copper veins and silver veins, a new kind of assaying instrument, and the good luck attendant upon the opening of Lloyd-Jones' new mine, the Liza Lu.

Aleck was the essence of courtesy to everything except sham, and was able to indicate a mild interest in Mr. Lloyd-Jones' mining affairs. It was sufficient. Lloyd-Jones turned sidewise on his end of the sofa, spread out plump, gesticulating hands, and poured upon him an eloquent torrent of fact, speculation and high-spirited enthusiasm concerning Idaho in general and the future of the Liza Lu in particular. More than that, by and by his cheerful, half-impudent manner threatened to turn poetic.

"It's great, living in the open out there," he went on, by this time including the whole company in his exordium. "You ride, or tramp, or dig rock all day; and at night you lie down under the clear stars, thankful for your blanket and your rock-bed and your camp-fire; and more than thankful if there's a bit of running water near by. It's a great life!"

Miss Reynier listened to him with eyes that were alternately puzzled and appreciative. It was a discourse that would have seemed to her much more natural coming from Aleck Van Camp; but then, Mr. Van Camp really did the thing—that sort of thing—and he rarely talked about it. It had probably been Mr. Lloyd-Jones' first essay in the world out of reach of his valet and a club cocktail; and he was consequently impressed with his achievement. It was evident that Miss Reynier and the amateur miner were on friendly terms, though Aleck had not seen or heard of him before. He had hob-nobbed with Mr. Chamberlain in London and on more than one scientific jaunt. The slightest flicker of jealous resentment gleamed in Aleck's eyes, but his speech was as slow and precise as ever.

"I was just trying to convince Miss Reynier that outdoor life has its peculiar joys," he said. "I was even now suggesting that she should dig, though not for silver. Does Mr. Lloyd-Jones' lucre seem more alluring than my little wriggly beasts, Miss Reynier?"

If Aleck meant this speech for a trap to force the young woman to indicate a preference, the trick failed, as it deserved to fail. Miss Reynier was able to play a waiting game.

"I couldn't endure either your mines or your mud-puddles. You are both absurd, and I don't understand how you ever get recruits for your hobbies. But come over and see this new engraving, Mr. Jones; it's an old-fashioned picture of your beloved Rhine."

Aleck, thus liberated from Mr. Lloyd-Jones and his mines, made his way across the room to Madame Reynier. The cunning of old Adam, was in his eye, but otherwise he was the picture of deferential innocence.

Madame Reynier liked Aleck, with his inoffensive Americanisms and unfailing kindliness; and

with her friends she was frankness itself. With two men on Miss Reynier's hands for entertainment, it seemed to Aleck unlikely that either one could make any alarming progress. Besides, he was glad of a tête-à-tête with the chaperone.

Madame Reynier was a tall, straight woman, elderly, dressed entirely in black, with gaunt, aristocratic features and great directness of speech. She had the fine kind of hauteur which forbids persons of this type ever to speak of money, of disease, of scandal, or of too intimate personalities; in Madame Reynier's case it also restrained her from every sort of exaggerated speech. She spoke English with some difficulty and preferred French.

Van Camp seated himself on a spindle-legged, gilt chair by Madame Reynier's side, and begged to know how they were enduring the New York climate, which had formerly proved intolerable to Madame Reynier. As he seated himself she stretched out saving hands.

"I can endure the climate, thank you; but I can't endure to see your life endangered on that silly chair, my dear Mr. Van Camp. There—thank you." And when he was seated in a solid mahogany, he was rewarded with Madame Reynier's confidential chat. They had returned to their New York apartment in the midst of the summer season, she said, "for professional advice." She and her niece liked the city and never minded the heat. Mélanie, her aunt explained, had been enabled to see several old friends, and, for her own part, she liked home at any time of the year better than the most comfortable of hotels.

"This is quite like home," she added, "even though we are really exiles." Aleck ventured to hope that the "professional advice" had not meant serious trouble of any sort.

"A slight indisposition only."

"And are you much better now?" Aleck inquired solicitously.

"Oh, it wasn't I; it was Mélanie," Madame smiled. "I became my own physician many years ago, and now I never see a doctor except when we ask one to dine. But youth has no such advantage." Madame fairly beamed with benevolence while explaining one of her pet idiosyncrasies. Before Aleck could make any headway in gleaning information concerning her own and Mélanie's movements, as he was shamelessly trying to do, Lloyd-Jones had persuaded Miss Reynier to sing.

"Some of those quaint old things, please," he was saying; and Aleck wondered if he never would hang himself with his own rope. But Lloyd-Jones' cheerful voice went on:

"Some of those Hungarian things are jolly and funny, even though you can't understand the words. Makes you want to dance or sing yourself." Aleck groaned, but Mélanie began to sing, with Jones hovering around the piano. By the time Mélanie had sung everybody's favorites, excluding Aleck's, Mr. Chamberlain rose to depart. He was an Englishman, a serious, heavy gentleman, very loyal to old friends and very slow in making new ones. He made an engagement to dine with Aleck on the following evening, and, as he went out, threw back to the remaining gentlemen an offer of seats in his machine.

"I ought to go," said Jones; "but if Van Camp will stay, I will. That is," he added with belated punctiliousness, "if the ladies will permit?"

"Thank you, Chamberlain, I'm walking," drawled Aleck; then turning to the company with his cheerful grin he stated quite impersonally: "I was thinking of staying long enough to put one question—er, a matter of some little importance—to Miss Reynier. When she gives me the desired information, I shall go."

"Me, too," chirped Mr. Lloyd-Jones. "I came expressly to talk over that plan of building up friendly adjoining estates out in Idaho; sort of private shooting and hunting park, you know. And I haven't had a minute to say a word." Jones suddenly began to feel himself aggrieved. As the door closed after Chamberlain, Mélanie motioned them back to their seats.

"It's not so very late," she said easily. "Come back and make yourselves comfortable, and I'll listen to both of you," she said with a demure little devil in her eye. "I haven't seen you for ages, and I don't know when the good moment will come again." She included the two men in a friendly smile, waved a hand toward the waiting chairs, and adjusted a light shawl over the shoulders of Madame Reynier.

But Aleck by this time had the bit in his teeth and would not be coaxed. His ordinarily cool eye rested wrathfully on the broad shoulders of Mr. Lloyd-Jones, who was lighting a cigarette, and he turned abruptly to Miss Reynier. His voice was as serious as if Parliament, at least, had been hanging on his words.

"May I call to-morrow, Miss Reynier, at about twelve?"

"Oh, I say," put in Jones, "all of you come to luncheon with me at the Little Gray Fox—will you? Capital place and all sorts of nice people. Do come. About one."

Van Camp could have slain him.

"I think my proposition a prior one," he remarked with dogged precision; "but, of course, Miss Reynier must decide." He recovered his temper enough to add, quite pleasantly, considering the circumstances, "Unless Madame Reynier will take my part?" turning to the older woman.

"Oh, no, not fair," shouted Jones. "Madame Reynier's always on my side. Aren't you, Madame?"

Madame Reynier smiled inscrutably. "I'm always on the side of virtue in distress," she said.

"That's me, then, isn't it? The way you're abusing me, Mademoiselle, listening here to Van Camp all the evening!"

But Mélanie, tired, perhaps, of being patiently tactful, settled the matter. "I can't go to luncheon with anybody, to-morrow," she protested. "I've had a touch of that arch-enemy, indigestion, you see; and I can't do anything but my prescribed exercises, nor drink anything but distilled water—"

"Nor eat anything but food! We know," cried the irrepressible Jones. "But the Little Gray Fox has a special diet for just such cases as yours. Do come!"

"Heavens! Then I don't want to go there!" groaned Aleck.

Mélanie gave Jones her hand, half in thanks and half in farewell. "No, thank you, not to-morrow, but sometime soon; perhaps Thursday. Will that do?" she smiled. Then, as Jones was discontentedly lounging about the door, she did a pretty thing. Turning from the door, she stood with face averted from everybody except Van Camp, and for an instant her eyes met his in a friendly, half-humorous but wholly non-committal glance. His eyes held hers in a look that was like an embrace.

"I will see you soon," she said quietly.

Van Camp said good night to Jones at the corner, after they had walked together in silence for half a block.

"Good night, Van Camp," said Jones; then he added cordially: "By the way, I'm going back next week in my private car to watch the opening of the Liza Lu, and I'd be mighty glad if you'd go along. Anything else to do?"

"Thanks—extremely; but I'm going on a cruise."

As Aleck entered the piously exclusive hall of the club his good nature came to his aid. He wondered whether he hadn't scored something, after all.

CHAPTER V.

MELANIE'S DREAMS

Midnight and the relaxation of slumber could subtract nothing from the high-browed dignity of the club officials, and the message that was waiting for Mr. Van Camp was delivered in the most correct manner. "Mr. Hambleton sends word to Mr. Van Camp that he has gone away on the *Jeanne D'Arc*. Mr. Hambleton may not be back for some time, and requests Mr. Van Camp to look after the *Sea Gull*."

"Very well, thank you," replied Aleck, rather absent-mindedly. He was unable to see, immediately, just what change in his own plans this sudden turn of Jim's would cause; and he was for the moment too deeply preoccupied with his own personal affairs to speculate much about it. His thoughts went back to the events of the evening, recalled the picture of his Diana and her teasing ways, and dwelt especially upon the honest, friendly, wholly bewitching look that had flown to him at the end of the evening. Absurd as his own attempt at a declaration had been, he somehow felt that he himself was not absurd in Mélanie's eyes, though he was far from certain whether she was inclined to marry him.

Aleck, on his part, had not come to his decision suddenly or impulsively; nor, having arrived there, was he to be turned from it easily. True as it was that he sincerely and affectionately desired Mélanie Reynier for a wife, yet on the whole he was a very cool Romeo. He was manly, but he was calculating; he was honorably disposed toward matrimony, but he was not reborn with love. And so, in the sober bedroom of the club, he quickly fell into the good sleep induced by fatigue and healthy nerves.

Morning brought counsel and a disposition to renew operations. A note was despatched to his Diana by a private messenger, and the boy was bidden to wait for an answer. It came presently:

"Come at twelve, if you wish.

"MELANIE REYNIER."

Aleck smiled with satisfaction. Here was a wise venture going through happily, he hoped. He was pleased that she had named the very hour he had asked for the night before. That was like her good, frank way of meeting a situation, and it augured well for the unknown emergencies of their future life. He had little patience with timidity and traditional coyness in women, and great admiration for an open and fearless spirit. Mélanie's note almost set his heart thumping.

But not quite; and no one understood the cool nature of that organ better than Mélanie herself. The ladies in the apartment at the Archangel had lingered at their breakfast, the austerity of which had been mitigated by a center decoration of orchids and fern, fresh-touched with dew; or so Madame Reynier had described them to Mélanie, as she brought them to her with the card of Mr. Lloyd-Jones. Miss Reynier smiled faintly, admired the blossoms and turned away.

The ladies usually spoke French with each other, though occasionally Madame Reynier dropped into the harsher speech of her native country. On this morning she did this, telling Mélanie, for the tenth time in as many days, that in her opinion they ought to be going home. Madame considered this her duty, and felt no real responsibility after the statement was made. Nevertheless, she was glad to find Mélanie disposed to discuss the matter a little further.

"Do you wish to go home, Auntie, or is it that you think I ought to go?"

"I don't wish to go without you, child, you know that; and I am very comfortable here. But his Highness, your cousin, is very impatient; I see that in every letter from Krolvetz. You offended him deeply by putting off your marriage to Count Lorenzo, and every day now deepens his indignation against you. I don't like to discuss these things, Mélanie, but I suspect that your action deprives him of a very necessary revenue; and I understand, better than you do, to what lengths your cousin is capable of going when he is displeased. You are, by the law of your country, his ward until you marry. Would it not be better to submit to him in friendship, rather than to incur his enmity? After all, he is your next of kin, the head of your family, and a very powerful man. If we are going home at all, we ought to go now."

"But suppose we should decide not to go home at all?"

"You will have to go some time, dear child. You are all alone, except for me, and in the nature of things you can't have me always. Now that you are young, you think it an easy thing to break away from the ties of blood and birth; but believe me, it isn't easy. You, with your nature, could never do it. The call of the land is strong, and the time will come when you will long to go home, long to go back to the land where your father led his soldiers, and where your mother was admired and loved."

Madame Reynier paused and watched her niece, who, with eyes cast down, was toying with her spoon. Suddenly a crimson flush rose and spread over Mélanie's cheeks and forehead and neck, and when she looked up into Madame Reynier's face, she was gazing through unshed tears. She rose quickly, came round to the older woman's chair and kissed her cheek affectionately.

"Dear Auntie, you are very good to me, and patient, too. It's all true, I suppose; but the prospect of home and Count Lorenzo together—ah, well!" she smiled reassuringly and again caressed Madame Reynier's gaunt old face. "I'll think it all over, Auntie dear."

Madame Reynier followed Mélanie into her sitting-room, bringing the precious orchids in her two hands, fearful lest the fragile vase should fall. Mélanie regarded them a moment, and then said she thought they would do better in the drawing-room.

"I sometimes think the little garden pink quite as pretty as an orchid."

"They aren't so much in Mr. Lloyd-Jones' style as these," replied Madame Reynier. She had a faculty of commenting pleasantly without the least hint of criticism. This remark delighted Mélanie.

"No; I should never picture Mr. Lloyd-Jones as a garden pink. But then, Auntie, you remember how eloquent he was about the hills and the stars. That speech did not at all indicate a hothouse nature."

"Nevertheless, I think his sentiments have been cultivated, like his orchids."

"Not a bad achievement," said Mélanie.

There was an interval of silence, while the younger woman stood looking out of the window and Madame Reynier cut the leaves of a French journal. She did not read, however, and presently she broke the silence. "I don't remember that Mr. Van Camp ever sent orchids to you."

"Mr. Van Camp never gave me any kind of flower. He thinks flowers are the most intimate of all gifts, and should only be exchanged between sweethearts. At least, I heard him expound some such theory years ago, when we first knew him."

Madame smiled—a significant smile, if any one had been looking. Nothing further was said until Mélanie unexpectedly shot straight to the mark with:

"How do you think he would do, Auntie, in place of Count Lorenzo?"

Madame Reynier showed no surprise. "He is a sterling man; but your cousin would never consent to it."

"And if I should not consult my cousin?"

"My dear Mélanie, that would entail many embarrassing consequences; and embarrassments are worse than crimes."

Mélanie could laugh at that, and did. "I've already answered a note from Mr. Van Camp this morning; Auntie. No, don't worry," she playfully answered a sudden anxious look that came upon her aunt's countenance, "I've not said 'yes' to him. But he's coming to see me at twelve. If I don't give him a chance to say what he has to say, he'll take one anywhere. He's capable of proposing on the street-cars. Besides, I have something also to say to him."

"Well, my dear, you know best; certainly I think you know best," was Madame Reynier's last word.

Mr. Van Camp arrived on the stroke of twelve, an expression of happiness on his lean, quizzical face.

"I'm supposed to be starting on a cruise," he told Mélanie, "but luck is with me. My cousin hasn't turned up—or rather he turned up only to disappear instantly. Otherwise he would have dragged me off to catch the first ebb-tide, with me hanging back like an anchor-chain."

"Is your cousin, then, such a tyrant?"

"Oh, yes; he's a masterful man, is Jimmy."

"And how did he 'disappear instantly?' It sounds mysterious."

"It is mysterious, but Jim can take care of himself; at least, I hope he can. The message said he had sailed on the *Jeanne D'Arc*, whatever that is, and that I was to look after our hired yacht, the *Sea Gull*."

Mélanie looked up, startled. "The *Jeanne D'Arc*, was it?" she cried. "Are you sure? But, of course—there must be many boats by that name, are there not? But did he say nothing more—where he was going, and why he changed his plans?"

"No, not a word more than that. Why? Do you know of a boat named the *Jeanne D'Arc*?"

"Yes, very well; but it can not matter. It must be another vessel, surely. Meanwhile, what are you going to do without your companion?"

Aleck rose from the slender gilt chair where, as usual, he had perched himself, walked to the window and thrust his hands into his pockets for a contemplative moment, then he turned and came to a stand squarely before Mélanie, looking down on her with his quizzical, honest eyes.

"That depends, Mélanie," he said slowly, "upon whether you are going to marry me or not."

"That depends upon whether you are going to marry me."

[Illustration: "That depends upon whether you are going to marry me."]

For a second or two Mélanie's eyes refused to lift; but Aleck's firm-planted figure, his steady gaze, above all, his dominating will, forced her to look up. There he was, smiling, strong, big, kindly. Mélanie started to smile, but for the second time that morning her eyes unexpectedly filled with tears.

"I can't talk to you towering over me like that," she said at last softly, her smile winning against the tears.

Aleck did not move. "I don't want you to 'talk to' me about it; all I want is for you to say 'yes.'"

"But I'm not going to say 'yes;' at least, I don't think I am. Do sit down."

Aleck started straight for the gilt chair.

"Oh, no; not that! You are four times too big for that chair. Besides, it's quite valuable; it's a Louis Quinze."

Aleck indulged in a vicious kick at the ridiculous thing, picked up an enormous leather-bottomed chair made apparently of lead, and placed it jauntily almost beside Miss Reynier's chair, but facing the other way.

"This is much better, thank you," he said. "Now tell me why you think you are not going to say 'yes' to me."

Mélanie's mood of softness had not left her; but sitting there, face to face with this man, face to face with his seriousness, his masculine will and strength, she felt that she had something yet to struggle for, some deep personal right to be acknowledged. It was with a dignity, an aloofness, that was quite real, yet very sweet, that she met this American lover. He had her hand in his firm grasp, but he was waiting for her to speak. He was giving her the hearing that was, in his opinion, her right.

"In the first place," Mélanie began, "you ought to know more about me—who I am, and all that sort of thing. I am, in one sense, not at all what I seem to be; and that, in the case of marriage, is a dangerous thing."

"It is an important thing, at least. But I do know who you are; I knew long ago. Since you never referred to the matter, of course I never did. You are the Princess Auguste Stephanie of Krolvetz, cousin of the present Duke Stephen, called King of Krolvetz. You are even in line for the throne, though there are two or three lives between. You have incurred the displeasure of Duke Stephen and are practically an exile from your country."

"A voluntary exile," Mélanie corrected.

"Voluntary only in the sense that you prefer exile to absolute submission to the duke. There is no alternative, if you return."

Mélanie was silent. Aleck lifted the hand which he held, touched it gently with his lips and laid it back beside its fellow on Mélanie's lap. Then he rose and lifted both hands before her, half in fun and half in earnestness, as if he were a courtier doing reverence to his queen.

"See, your Highness, how ready I am to do you homage! Only smile on the most devoted of your servants."

Mélanie could not resist his gentle gaiety. It was as if they were two children playing at a story. Aleck, in such a mood as this, was as much fun as a dancing bear, and in five minutes more he had won peals of laughter from Mélanie. It was what he wanted—to brighten her spirits. So presently he came back to the big chair, though he did not again take her hand.

"I knew you were titled and important, Mélanie, and at first I thought that sealed my case entirely. But you seemed to forget your state, seemed not to care so very much about it; and perhaps that made me think it was possible for us both to forget it, or at least to ignore it. I haven't a gold throne to give you; but you're the only woman I've ever wanted to marry, and I wasn't going to give up the chance until you said so."

"Do you know also that if I marry out of my rank and without the consent of Duke Stephen, I shall forfeit all my fortune?"

"'Cut off without a cent!'" Aleck laughed, but presently paused, embarrassed for the first time since he had begun his plea. "I, you know, haven't millions, but there's a decent income, even for two. And then I can always go to work and earn something," he smiled at her, "giving information to a thirsty world about the gill-slit, as you call it. It would be fun, earning money for you; I'd like to do it."

Mélanie smiled back at him, but left her chair and wandered uneasily about the room, as if turning a difficult matter over in her mind. Aleck stood by, watching. Presently she returned to her chair, pushed him gently back into his seat and dropped down beside him. Before she spoke, she touched her fingers lightly, almost lovingly, along the blue veins of his big hand lying on the arm of the chair. The hand turned, like a magnet spring, and imprisoned hers.

"No, dear friend, not yet," said Mélanie, drawing away her hand, yet not very quickly after all. "There is much yet to say to you, and I have been wondering how to say it, but I shall do it now. Like the heroes in the novels," she smiled again, "I am going to tell you the story of my life."

"Good!" said Aleck. "All ready for chapter one. But your maid wants you at the door."

"Go away, Sophie," said Mélanie. "Serve luncheon to Madame Reynier alone. I shall wait; and you'll have to wait, too, poor man!" She looked scrutinizingly at Aleck. "Or are you, perhaps, hungry? I'm not going to talk to a hungry man," she announced.

"Not a bite till I've heard chapter thirty-nine!" said Aleck.

In a moment she became serious again.

"I have lived in England and here in America," she began, "long enough to understand that the differences between your people and mine are more than the differences of language and climate; they are ingrained in our habits of thought, our education, our judgments of life and of people. My childhood and youth were wholly different from yours, or from what an American girl's could be; and yet I think I understand your American women, though I suppose I am not in the least like them.

"But I, on the other hand, have seen the dark side of life, and particularly of marriage. When I was a child I was more important in my own country than I am now, since it seemed then that my father would succeed to the throne. I was brought up to feel that I was not a woman, but a pawn in the game of politics. When I had been out of the convent for a year or more, I loved a youth, and was loved in return, but our marriage was laughed at, put aside, declared impossible, because he was of a rank inferior to my own. My lover disappeared, I know not where or how. Then affairs changed. My father died, and it transpired that I had been officially betrothed since childhood to Duke Stephen's brother, the Count Lorenzo. The duke was my guardian, and there was no one else to whom I could appeal; but the very week set for the wedding I faced the duke and declared I would never marry the count. His Highness raged and stormed, but I told him a few things I knew about his brother, and I made him see that I was in earnest. The next day I left Krolvetz, and the duke gave out that I was ill and had gone to a health resort; that the wedding was postponed. I went to France and hid myself with my aunt, took one of my own middle names and her surname, and have been known for some time, as you know, as Mélanie Reynier."

"I know you wish to tell me all these things, Mélanie, but I do not want you to recall painful matters of the past now," said Aleck gently. "You shall tell me of them at another time."

The color brightened in Mélanie's face, her eyes glowed.

"No, not another time; you must understand now, especially because all this preface leads me to what I really want to say to you. It is this: I do not now care for the man I loved at nineteen, nor for any of the other men of my country who have been pleased to honor me with their regard. But ever since those early days I have had a dream of a home—a place different from Duke Stephen's home, different from the homes of many people of my rank. My dream has a husband in it who is a companion, a friend, my equal in love, my superior in strength." Mélanie's eyes lifted to meet Aleck's, and they were full of an almost tragic passion; but it was a passion for comprehension and love, not primarily for the man sitting before her. She added simply: "And for my dream I'd give all the wealth, all the love, I have."

The room was very still. Aleck Van Camp sat quiet and grave, his forehead resting on his hand. He looked up, finally, at Mélanie, who was beside him, pale and quite worn.

"Poor child! You needed me more than I thought!" was what he said.

But Mélanie had not quite finished. "No, that is not enough, that I should need you. You must also need me, want what I alone can give you, match my love with yours. And this, I think, you do not do. You calculate, you remain cool, you plan your life like a campaign, and I am part of your equipment. You are a thousand times better than Count Lorenzo, but I think your principles of reasoning are the same. You do not love me enough, and that is why I can not say yes."

Aleck had taken this last blow standing. He walked slowly around and stood before Mélanie, much as he had stood before her when he first asked her to marry him; and this time, as he looked down on her fairness, there was infinite gentleness and patience and love in his eyes. He bent over, lifted Mélanie's two hands, and drew her bodily out of her seat. She was impassive. Her quick alertness, her vitality, her passionate seriousness, had slipped away. Aleck put his arms around her very tenderly, and kissed her lips; not a lover's kiss exactly, and yet nothing else. Then he looked into her face.

"I shall not do this again, Mélanie dear, till you give me leave. But I have no mind to let you go, either. You and Madame Reynier are going on a cruise with me; will you? Get your maid to pack your grip. It will be better for you than the 'professional advice' which you came to New York for."

Aleck stopped suddenly, his practical sense coming to the surface. "Heavens! You haven't had any lunch, and it's all times of the day!" He rang the bell, begged the maid to fetch bread and butter and tea and to ask Madame Reynier to come to the drawing-room. When she appeared, he met her with a grave, but in no wise a cowed, spirit.

"Madame Reynier, your niece refuses, for the present, to consider herself engaged to me; I, however, am unequivocally betrothed to her. And I shall be endlessly grateful if you and Miss Reynier will be my guests on the *Sea Gull* for as long a time as you find it diverting. We shall cruise along the coast and put into harbor at night, if it seems best; and I'll try to make you comfortable. Will you come?"

Madame Reynier was willing if Mélanie was; and Mélanie had no strength, if she had the will, to combat Aleck's masterful ways. It was soon settled. Aleck swung off down the street, re-reading Jim's letter, intent only on the *Sea Gull* and the preparations for his guests. But at the back of his mind he was thinking, "Poor girl! She needs me more than I thought!"

CHAPTER VI

ON BOARD THE JEANNE D'ARC

If hard usage and obstacles could cure a knight-errant of his sentiment, then Jimmy Hambleton had been free of his passion for the Face. His plunge overboard had been followed by a joyous swim, a lusty call to the yacht for "Help," and a growing amazement when he realized that it was the yacht's intention to pass him by. He had swum valiantly, determined to get picked up by that particular craft, when suddenly his strength failed. He remembered thinking that it was all up with him, and then he lost consciousness.

When he awoke he was on a hard bunk in a dim place, and a sailor was jerking him about. His throat burned with a fiery liquid. Then he felt the plunging and rising of the boat, and came to life sufficiently to utter the stereotyped words, "Where am I?"

In Jim's case the question did not imply the confused groping back to sense that it usually indicates, but rather an actual desire to know whether or not he was on board the *Jeanne D'Arc*. Plainly his wits had not been badly shattered by his experience overboard. But the sailor who was

attending him with such ministrations as he understood, answered him with a sample of French which Jim had never met with in his school-books, and he was not enlightened for some hours.

It turned out, indeed, to be the *Jeanne D'Arc*, as Jim proved for himself the next day, and he was lying in the seamen's quarters in the fo'cas'le. By morning he felt much better, hungry, and prepared in his mind for striking a bargain with one of the sailors for clothes. He could make out their lingo soon, he guessed, and then he would get a suit of clothes and fare on deck. Suddenly he grasped his waist, struck with an unpleasant thought; his money-belt was gone! He was wearing a sailor's blue flannel shirt and nothing else. He turned over on his hard bunk, thinking that he would have to wait a while before making his entrance on the public stage of the *Jeanne D'Arc*.

And wait he did. Not a rag of clothing was in sight, and no cajolery or promise of reward could persuade the ship's men into supplying his need. He received consignments of food; short rations they would be, he judged, for an able-bodied seaman. But inactivity and confinement to the fo'cas'le soon worked havoc with his physique, so that appetite, and even desire of life itself, temporarily disappeared in the gloom of seasickness.

In spite of difficulties, Jim tried to find out something about the boat. The seamen were none too friendly; but by patching up his almost forgotten French and by signs, he learned something. His sudden failure of strength in the water had been due to a blow from a floating spar, as a bruise on his forehead testified; "the old man," whom Jim supposed to be the captain, was a hard master; Monsieur Chatelard was owner, or at least temporary proprietor, of the yacht; and the present voyage was an unlucky one by all the signs and omens known to the seamen's horoscope.

The sullenness of the men was apparent, and was not caused by the enforced presence of a stranger among them. In fact, their bad temper became so conspicuous that Jim began to believe that it might have something to do with the mysterious actions of the man on shore. He pondered the situation deeply; he evolved many foolish schemes to compass his own enlightenment, and dismissed them one by one. He grimly reflected that a man without clothes can scarcely be a hero, whatever his spirit. Not since the days of Olympus was there any record of man or god being received into any society whatever without his sartorial shell, thought Jimmy. But in spite of his discomfort, he was glad he was there. The intuition that had led him since that memorable Sunday afternoon was strong within him still, and he never questioned its authority. He believed his turn would come, even though he were a prisoner in the fo'cas'le of the *Jeanne D'Arc*.

As the violence of his sickness passed, Jim began to cast about for some means of helping himself. Gradually he was able to dive into the forgotten shallows of his French learning. By much wrinkling of brows he evolved a sentence, though he had to wait some hours before there was a favorable chance to put it to use. At last his time came, with the arrival of his former friend, the sailor.

"Oo avay-voo cashay mon money-belt?" he inquired with much confidence, and with pure Yankee accent.

The sailor answered with a shrug and a spreading of empty hands.

"Pas de money-belt, pas de pantalon, pas de tous! Dam queer Amayricain!"

Jim was not convinced of the sailor's innocence, but perceived that he must give him the benefit of the doubt. As the sailor intimated, Jim, himself, was open to suspicion, and couldn't afford to be too zealous in calumniating others. He fell to thinking again, and attacked the next Frenchman that came into the fo'cas'le with the following:

"Kond j'aytay malade don ma tate, kee a pree mon money-belt?"

It was the ship's cook this time, and he turned and stared at Jimmy as though he had seen a ghost. When he found tongue he uttered a volume of opinion and abuse which Jimmy knew by instinct was not fit to be translated, and then he fled up the ladder.

On the fourth day, toward evening, James had a visitor. All day the yacht had been pitching and rolling, and by afternoon she was laboring in the violence of a storm and was listing badly.

James was a fearless seaman, but it crossed his mind more than once that if he were captain, and if there were a port within reach, he would put into it before midnight. But he could tell nothing of the ship's course. He turned the subject over in his mind as he lay on his bunk in that peculiar state half-way between sickness and health, when the body is relaxed by a purely accidental illness and the mind is abnormally alert. He wished intensely for a bath, a shave, and a fair complement of clothes. He longed also to go up the hatchway for a breath of air, and was considering the possibility of doing this later, with a blanket and darkness for a shield, when he became conscious of a pair of neatly trousered legs descending the ladder. It was quite a different performance from the catlike climbing up and down of the sailors.

Jimmy watched in the dim light until the whole figure was complete, fantastically supplying, in his imagination, the coat, the shirt, the collar and the tie to go with the trousers—all the things which he himself lacked. Was there also a hat? Jimmy couldn't make out, and so he asked.

"Have you got on a hat?"

A frigid voice answered, "I beg your pardon!"

"I said, are you wearing a hat? I couldn't see, you know."

"Monsieur takes the liberty of being impertinent."

"Oh, excuse me—I beg your pardon. But it's so beastly hot and dark in here, you know, and I've never been seasick before."

"No? Monsieur is fortunate." The visitor advanced a little, drew from a recess a shoe-blacking outfit, pulled over it one of the stiff blankets from a neighboring bunk, and sat down rather cautiously. Little by little James made out more of the look of the man. He was large and rather blond, well-dressed, clean-shaven. He spoke English easily, but with a foreign accent.

"I wish to inquire to what unfortunate circumstances we are indebted for your company on board the *Jeanne D'Arc*." The voice was cool, and sharp as a meat-ax.

"Why, to your own kind-heartedness. I was a derelict and you took me in—saved my life, in fact; for which I am profoundly grateful. And I hope my presence here is not too great a burden?"

"I am obliged to say that your presence here is most unwelcome. Moreover, I am aware that your previous actions are open to suspicion, to express it mildly. You threw yourself off the tug; and as this as not a pleasure yacht, but the vessel of a high official speeding on a most important business matter, I said to the captain, 'Let him swim! Or, if he wishes to die, why should we thwart him?' But the captain referred to the 'etiquette of the line,' as he calls it, and picked you up. So you have not me to thank for not being among the fishes this minute."

Jimmy pulled his blanket about and sat up on his bunk. The sarcastic voice stirred his bile, and suddenly there boomed in his memory a woman's call for help. The hooded motor-car, the muffled cry of terror, the inert figure being lifted over the side of the yacht—these things crowded on his brain and fired him to a sudden, unreasoning fury. He leaned over, looking sharply into the other's face.

"You damned scoundrel!" he said, choking with his anger. The blood surged into his face and eyes; he was, for an instant, a primitive savage. He could have laid violent hands on the other man and done him to death, in the fashion of the half-gods who lived in the twilight of history.

The visitor in the fo'cas'le exhibited a neat row of teeth and no resentment whatever at Jim's remark, But a sharp glitter shot from his eyes as he replied suavely:

"Monsieur has doubtless mistaken this ship, and probably its master also, for some other less worthy adventurer on the sea. For that very reason I have come to set you right. It may be that I have my quixotic moments. At any rate, I have a fancy to give you a gentleman's chance. Monsieur, I regret the necessity of being inhospitable, but I am forced to say that you must quit the shelter of this yacht within twenty-four hours."

The thin, sarcastic voice and clean-cut syllables fanned the flame of Jimmy's rage. He felt impotent, moreover, which never serves as a poultice to anger. But he got himself in hand, though imitation courtesy was not much in his line. He tuned his big hearty voice to a pitch with the Frenchman's nasal pipe, and clipped off his words in mimicry.

"And to whom, pray, shall I have the honor to say farewell, at the auspicious moment when I jump overboard?"

"Gently, you American, gently!" said the other. "My friends, and some of my enemies, know me as Monsieur Chatelard." As he paused for an impressive instant, Jim, grabbing his blanket, stood up in derision and executed an elaborate bow in as foreign a manner as he could command. Monsieur Chatelard politely waved him down and continued:

"But pray do not trouble to give me your card! I had rather say adieu to Monsieur the Unknown, whose daring and temper I so much admire. But I certainly misunderstood your violent remark a moment ago, did I not? You can not possibly have any ground of quarrel with me."

"I thought you stole my money-belt."

Monsieur smiled and waved a deprecatory hand. "You have already dismissed that idea, I am certain. A money-belt, between gentlemen! Moreover, you should thank me for so much as recognizing the gentleman in you, since you are without the customary trappings of our class."

"Oh, I don't know," said Jim. But Monsieur Chatelard was now imperturbable. He continued blandly:

"Since you are fond of sea-baths, you will no doubt enjoy a plunge—to-night possibly. As we have made rather slow progress, we are really not so far from shore. Yes, on second thought, I would by all means advise you to take your departure tonight. Swim back to shore the way you came. In any case, your absence is desired. There will be no room or provision or water for you

on board the *Jeanne D'Arc* after to-night. Is my meaning clear?"

Jim was watching, as well as he could, the immobile, expressionless face, and did not immediately note that Monsieur Chatelard had drawn a small, shiny object from his hip pocket and was holding it carelessly in his lap. As his gaze focussed on the revolver, however, he did the one thing, perhaps, which at that moment could have put the Frenchman off his guard. He threw his head back and laughed aloud.

But before his laugh had time to echo in the narrow fo'cas'le, Jim leaped from his bunk upon his tormentor, like a cat upon a mouse, seized his right hand in a paralyzing grip, and was himself thrown violently to the floor. The struggle was brief, for the Frenchman was no match for Jim in strength and scarcely superior to him in skill; but it took one of Jim's old wrestling feints to get the better of his opponent. He came out, in five seconds, with the pistol in his hand. Monsieur Chatelard, a bit breathless, but not greatly discomposed, peered out at him from the edge of the opposite bunk, where he sat uncomfortably. His cynical voice capped the struggle like a streak of pitch.

"Pray keep the weapon. You are welcome, though your methods are somewhat surprising. Had I known them earlier, I might have offered you my little toy."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Jimmy. "I thought you might not be used to firearms, that's all."

The varnished surface of Monsieur Chatelard's countenance gave no evidence of his having heard Jim's remark.

"Don't fancy that your abrupt movements, have deprived me of what authority I may happen to possess on this vessel. My request as to your future action still stands, unless you had rather one of my faithful men should assist you in carrying out my purpose."

Hambleton stood with legs wide apart to keep his balance, regarding the weapon in his hand, from which his gaze traveled to the man on the bunk. When it came to dialogue, he was no match for this sarcastic purveyor of words. He wondered whether Monsieur Chatelard was actually as cool as he appeared. As he stood there, the *Jeanne D'Arc* pitched forward until it seemed that she could never right herself, then slowly and laboriously she rode the waves again.

"You are a more picturesque villain than I thought," remarked James. "You have all the tricks of the stage hero—secret passages, fancy weapons, and—crowning glory—a fatal gift of gab!"

Monsieur Chatelard arose, making his way toward the hatch.

"Many thanks. I can not return the compliment in such a happy choice of English," he scoffed, "but I can truthfully say that I have rarely seen so striking and unique a figure as I now behold; certainly never on the stage, to which you so politely refer."

But James was too deeply intent on his next move to be embarrassed by his lack of clothes. Not in vain had his gorge risen almost at first sight of this man. He stepped quickly in front of Monsieur Chatelard, blocking his exit up the ladder, while the revolver in his hand looked straight between the Frenchman's eyes.

Whatever Chatelard's crimes were, he was not a coward. He did not flinch, but his eyes gleamed like cold steel as Jim cornered him.

"Now," said Jim, "I have my turn." Wrath burned in his heart.

"Captain Paquin! Antoine, Antoine!" called Chatelard. No one answered the call of the master of the ship, but even as the two men measured their force one against the other, they were arrested by a commotion above. Voices were heard shouting, trampling feet were running back and forth over the deck, and a moment later the ship's cook came tumbling down the hatchway, screaming in terror. He glared unheeding at the two men, and his teeth chattered. Fear had possession of him.

Jim lifted his revolver well out of reach, and backed off from Chatelard. For the first time during the interview between the American and the Frenchman, the two now faced each other as man to man, with the mask of their suspicions, their vanities and their hate cast aside.

"What is the matter? What is this fool saying?" Jim asked in loathing.

At last Monsieur Chatelard looked at Jim with eyes of fear. His face became so pale and drawn that it resembled a sponge from which the last drop of water had been pressed.

"He says the yacht is half full of water—that she is sinking," the Frenchman said.

"Sinking!" echoed Jim, bearing down again, with lowered revolver, on his enemy. "Well and good! You're going to be drowned, not shot, after all! And now you shall speak, you scamp! Your game's up, whatever happens. Get up and lead the way, quick, and show me in what part of this infernal boat you are hiding Agatha Redmond."

Chatelard started toward the hatchway, followed sharply by Jim's revolver, but at the foot of

the ladder he turned his contemptuous, sneering face toward Jim, with the remark:

"Your words are the words of a fool, you pig of an American! There is no lady aboard this yacht, and I never so much as heard of your Agatha Redmond. Otherwise, I'd be pleased to play Mercury to your Venus."

To Jim's ears, every syllable the Frenchman spoke was an insult, and the last words rekindled the fire in his blood.

"You shall pay for that speech here and now!" he yelled; and, discarding his revolver, he dealt the Frenchman a short-arm blow. Chatelard, trying to dodge, tripped over the base of the ladder and went down heavily on the floor of the fo'cas'le. He had apparently lost consciousness.

As Jim saw his victim stretched on the floor, he turned away with loathing. He picked up his revolver and went up the ladder. It was already dark, and confusion reigned on deck. But through the clamor, Jim made out something near the truth: the *Jeanne D'Arc* was leaking badly, and no time was to be lost if she, with her passengers and crew, were to be saved.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROPE LADDER

The near prospect of a conclusive struggle for life is a sharp tonic to the adventurous soul. The actual final summons to that Other Room is met variously. There is Earthly Dignity, who answers even this last tap at the door with a fitting and quotable rejoinder; there is Deathbed Repentance, whose unction *in momento mortis* is doubtless a comfort to pious relatives; and there are Chivalry and Valor, twin youths who go to the unknown banquet singing and bearing their garlands of joy.

But with the chance of a fight for life, there is a sharp-sweet tang that sends some spirits galloping to the contest. "Dauntless the slughorn to his lips he set—" making ready for the last good run.

When Jim descended the hatchway after reconnoitering on deck, Chatelard was gone. The ship's cook was rummaging in a sailor's kit that he had drawn from a locker. Jim mentally considered the situation. The seamen had no doubt exaggerated the calamity, but without question there was serious trouble. Were the pumps working? How far were they from shore? If hopelessly distant from shore, were they in the course of passing steamers? Would any one look after Miss Redmond's safety? Monsieur Chatelard had said that she was not on board, but James did not believe it.

While these thoughts new through his mind, James had been absently watching while the cook turned his treasures out upon his bunk, and pawed them over with trembling hands. There were innumerable little things, besides a stiff white shirt, a cheap shiny Bible, a stuffed parrot and several wads of clothes. And among the mess Jim caught sight of a piece of stitched canvas that looked familiar.

"Hi, you there! That's my money-belt!" he cried, and jumped forward to claim his own. But in his movement he failed to calculate with the waves. The yacht gave another of her deep-sea plunges, and Jimmy, thrown against his bunk, saw the cook grab his kit and make for the ladder. He regained his feet only in time to follow at arm's length up the hatchway. At the top he threw himself down, like a baseball runner making his base, after the seaman's legs; but instead of a foot, he found himself clutching one of the wads of clothes that trailed after the cook's bundle. He caught it firmly and kept it, but the ship's cook and the rest of his booty disappeared like a rabbit into its burrow.

Jim sat down at the top of the ladder and examined his haul. It was a pair of woolen trousers, and they were of generous size. He spread them out on the deck. Round him were unmistakable signs of demoralization. The second officer was ordering the men to the pumps in stern tones; the yacht was pitching wildly and growing darkness was settling on the face of the turbulent waters. But in spite of it all, Jimmy's spirit leaped forth in laughter as he thought of his brief, frantic chase, and its result in this capture of the characteristic vestiture of man.

"What's money for, anyway!" he laughed, as he got up and clothed himself once more.

There followed hours of superhuman struggle to save the *Jeanne D'Arc*. Her crew, sufficient in ordinary weather, was too small to cope with the storm and the leaking ship. Ballast had to be shifted or flung overboard. Repairs had to be attempted in the hold; the pumps had to be worked incessantly, It transpired that the yacht had gone far out of her course during the fog the night before, and had tried to turn inshore, even before the leak was discovered. No one knew what

waters they were that lashed so furiously about the disabled craft. The storm overhead had abated, but the rage of the sea was unquelled. Before long the engine was stopped by the rising water, and then the hand pumps were used. There was some hope that the leak had been discovered and at least partly repaired. The captain thought that, if carefully managed, the yacht might hold till daylight.

Jimmy joined the gang and worked like a Trojan, helping wherever a man was needed, shifting ballast, untackling the boats, handling the pump. It was at the pump that he found himself, some time during the night, working endlessly, it seemed. Not once had he lost sight of the real purpose of his presence on the yacht. If Agatha Redmond were aboard the unlucky vessel —and he had moments of curious perplexity about it—he was there to watch for her safety. He pictured her sitting somewhere in the endangered vessel. She could not but be terrified at her predicament. Whether shipwreck or abduction threatened her, she must feel that she had indeed fallen into the hands of her enemies.

He worked his turn at the pump, then made up his mind to risk no further delay, but to search the ship's cabins. She was in one of them, he believed; frightened she must be, possibly ill. He had done all that the furthest stretch of duty could demand in assistance to the ship. He would find Agatha Redmond at any cost, if she were aboard the *Jeanne D'Arc*. Again he thought to himself that he was glad he was there. Whatever purpose her enemies had, he alone was on her side, he alone could do something to save her.

It was now long past midnight, but not pitch dark either on deck or on the sea. The electric lights had gone out long before, but lanterns had been swung here and there from the deck fixtures. As Jimmy came up, he thought the men were preparing to lower the boats, but when he asked about it in his difficult French, the sailor shook his head. There were more people about than he supposed the yacht carried: several seamen, three or four other men, and a fat woman sitting apathetically on a pile of rope. He went from group to group, and from end to end of the yacht, looking for one woman's face and figure. He saw Monsieur Chatelard, examining one of the boats. He ran down the saloon stairway, determined to search the cabins before he gave up his quest. One moment he prayed that the words of Chatelard might be true, and that she had never been aboard the yacht; the next moment he prayed he might find her behind the next closed door.

As James searched below deck, a house palatial disclosed itself, even in the dim light of the little lanterns. Cabins roomy and comfortable, furnishings of exquisite taste, all the paraphernalia of the cultured and the rich were there. Some of the cabin doors were standing open, and none was locked. Jimmy beat on them, called from room to room, finding nothing. Every human occupant was gone. Sick at heart, he again rushed on deck. Was he mistaken, after all? Or had they hidden her in some secret part of the ship where he could not find her?

When Jimmy got back to the deck he saw that the groups had gathered on the port side. Sharp orders were being given. He crowded to the railing, straining his eyes to see, and found that they were transferring the ship's company to the boats, A rope ladder swung from the deck to a boat beneath, which bobbed like a cork beside, the big, plunging yacht. Two people were in the boat, a sailor standing at the bow, and a large muffled figure of a woman sitting in the stern. Jimmy at once knew her to be the apathetic fat woman he had seen a few minutes before on deck. His eye searched the company crowded about the top of the rope ladder, and suddenly his heart leaped. There she was, at the edge of the deck, waiting for the captain to give the word for her to descend to the boat below. As Jimmy's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he saw her more and more plainly: a pale face framed in a dark hood, a tall, cloaked figure waiting calmly to obey the word from the superior officer.

It was the third time Jimmy had seen her, but he felt as if he had found one dearer than himself. His eyes dwelt on her. She was not terrified; her nerves were not shaken. "I am ready," she said, turning to the captain. It was the same fine, free voice, suggesting—Oh, what did it not suggest! Never this dark, wild night of danger! Jimmy thrilled to it again as he had thrilled to it once before. He waved jubilant hands. "Agatha Redmond!" he called, across the space and heads that divided them.

Whether she heard his call he did not know. At that moment the word was given, and she turned an almost smiling face to the captain in reply. She knelt to the deck and got footing on the slippery rope. Men above held it and helped as best they could, while the sailor below waited to receive her into the little boat. She was steady and quick as a woman in such a perilous position could be. As she descended, the rowboat, insecurely held to the *Jeanne D'Arc*, slid sternward a few feet; and while she waited in midair for the boat to be brought up again, the *Jeanne D'Arc* gave a mighty plunge. The captain shouted from the deck, a sailor yelled, then another; the dipping sea tossed the yacht so that for an instant the boat below and the woman on the ladder were hidden from Jim's view. He climbed over the rail and edged along the narrow margin of the deck until he was a few feet nearer the rope, his heart thumping with fear of calamity.

And even as the thought came, the thing happened. The wrenching of the ropes, the insecurity of their fastenings, some blunder on the part of the seamen—whatever it was, the rope loosened like a filament of gauze, and, with its precious burden, dropped into the angry water. Before a breath could be drawn, the black waves churned over her head.

As, for the second time, Jim saw disaster engulf the Vision that had such power over him, he was seized by a cold numbness.

"Oh, you brutes!" he groaned aloud; but his groan had scarcely escaped him when he heard loud altercation among the men, and in a moment the nasal tones of Monsieur Chatelard commanding: "Never mind! Quick with the boat on the other side!"

The seamen rushed to the opposite side, now impatient to make the boats. In the fear that was growing momently upon the men, there was no one to give a thought to the vanished woman. Jimmy clung to the rail for a second, peering over the water. With a cry of gladness he saw her pale face rise to the surface of the water several feet away and toward the bow.

"Keep up a second! It's all right!" he shouted. Quick as thought he snatched a life preserver from its place on the rail, and ran forward. He called thrice, "Keep up, I'm coming!" then threw the cork swiftly and accurately to the very spot where she floated. A second longer he watched, to see if she gained it. It seemed that she did, and yet something was wrong. She was not able to right herself immediately in the water, but floundered helplessly. Jimmy knew that her clothes were hampering her, or else that the rope ladder had entangled her feet.

He turned and got his balance on the narrow ledge, pointed his hands high above his head, and took a good breath. Then he dove toward the floating face. When he came to the surface she was there, not ten strokes away. He swam to her, placed firm hands under her arms, and steadied her while she cleared her feet from the entangling rope.

"Thank God!" he breathed. "I'll save you yet!"

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE BREAST OF THE SEA

"Can you keep afloat in this roughness?"

"I think so, now that I have the life preserver. But the rope scared me for a minute. It got wound about my feet."

"I thought so. But we are drifting away from the boats, and should swim back as fast as we can. Can you swim?"

"Yes; better when I get rid of this cloak. Which way is the yacht? I've lost my bearings."

"Behind us over there. Put your hand on my shoulder and I'll take you along until you get your breath. So!"

The girl obeyed implicitly, "as if she were a good, biddable child," thought Jim. There was none of the terrified clutching at a rescuer which sometimes causes disaster to two instead of one. Miss Redmond was badly shocked, it may be; but she was far from being in a panic.

"Now for the boat. Can you swim a little faster? They'll surely come back to pick us up," said Jim, with an assumption of confidence that he did not feel. They could hear voices from the yacht, and could follow, partially, what was going on. Miss Redmond cast loose her cloak, put a hand on Jim's shoulder, and together they swam nearer. "Ahoy!" shouted Jim. "Give us a hand!" But the boat with the large woman in it had put about to the other side of the yacht. "Ahoy! This way!" shouted Jim. "Throw us a rope!" he cried; but if any of the seamen of the *Jeanne D'Arc* heard, they paid no heed.

"Come this way," said James to his companion. "We'll catch them on the other side of the yacht."

"I can't swim much in all these clothes," said Agatha.

"Never mind, then. Hold on to the life preserver and to me, and we'll make it all right." On the crests of the swelling waves they swam round the dark bulk of the vessel, and heard plainly the clamor of the men as they embarked in the small boats. Two of them seemed to be fastened together, raft-like, on the starboard side of the yacht, and were quickly filled with men. Prayers and curses were audible, with the loose, wild inflexion of the man who is in the clutch of an overmastering fear. As long as there had been work for them to do on the ship, they had done it, though sullenly; they had even controlled themselves until the attempt was made to place the two women in safety. But after that their self-restraint vanished. The orders of the officers were unheeded; the men leaped and scrambled and slid into the boats, and in a minute more they had cut loose from the *Jeanne D'Arc*.

James dimly perceived that the boats were moving away from them into the darkness. Then he called, and called again, redoubling his speed in swimming; but only the beat of the oars came back to him over the water. The heart in him stood still with an unacknowledged fear. Was it possible they were absolutely leaving them behind? Surely there were other boats. He raised his voice and called again and again. At last one voice, careless and brutal, called back something in reply. Jim turned questioning eyes to the girl beside him, whose pale face was clearly discernible on the dark water.

"He says the boats are all full."

"Then we must hurry and make for the yacht. Where is she?"

The *Jeanne D'Arc* had slipped away from them into the darkness.

"She was this way, I thought. Yes, I am sure," said Agatha, pointing into the night. But though they swam that way, they did not come upon her. They turned a little, and then turned again, and presently they lost every sense of direction.

In all his life Jim was never again destined to go through so black an hour as that which followed the abandonment of the *Jeanne D'Arc*. His courage left him, and his spirit sank to that leaden, choking abyss where light did not exist. Since the immediate object of saving the ship, for which he had worked as hard as any other, had been given up, the next in importance was to save the woman who, for some mysterious reason, had been aboard. It was beyond his power of imagination to suppose that any other motive of action could possibly prevail, even among her enemies. That they should leave her to drown, while they themselves fled to comparative safety in a boat, was more than he could believe.

"Surely they do not mean it; they must return, for you, at least."

The girl beside him knew better, but she was conscious of the paralyzing despair in her companion's heart, and made a show of being cheerful.

"When they find they are safe they may think of us," she said. "But the men were already crazed with fear, even before the leak was discovered. One of their mates on the voyage over was a fortune-teller, and he prophesied danger to them all on their next trip. After they had come into port, the fortune-teller himself died. And who can blame them for their fear? They are all superstitious; and as no one ever regarded their fears, now they have no regard for anybody's feelings but their own."

"But we are in the middle of the Atlantic, no one knows where. We may drift for days—we may starve—the Lord only knows what will happen to us!"

Agatha, who had been floating, swam a little nearer and laid her hand on Jim's shoulder, until he looked into her face. It was full of strength and brightness.

"'The sea is His also,'" she quoted gently. "Besides, we may get picked up," she went on. "I'm very well off, for my part, as you see. Can swim or rest floating, thanks to this blessed cork thing, and not at all hurt by the fall from the rope. But I must get rid of my shoes and some of my clothes, if I have to swim."

It is awkward to kick off one's shoes and divest oneself of unnecessary clothing in the water, and Agatha laughed at herself as she did it. "Not exactly a bathing suit, but this one black skirt will have to do. The others must go. It was my skirts that caused the mischief with the rope at first. And I was scared!"

"You had a right to be." Jim helped her keep afloat, and presently he saw that, freed from the entanglement of so many clothes, she was as much at home in the water as he. Suddenly she turned to him, caught by some recollection that almost eluded her.

"I don't think we are anywhere near the middle of the Atlantic," she said thoughtfully. James was silent, eating the bitter bread of despair, in spite of the woman's brave wish to comfort him. They were swimming slowly as they talked, still hoping to reach the yacht. They rose on the breast of the waves, paused now and then till a quieter moment came, and always kept near each other in the pale blue darkness.

"Old Sophie said something—that some one had tampered with the wheel, I think. At any rate, she said we'd never get far from shore with this crew."

James considered the case. "But even suppose we are within a mile or two, say, of the shore, could you ever swim two miles in this heavy sea?"

"It is growing calmer every minute. See, I can do very well, even swimming alone. It must be near morning, too, and that's always, a good thing." There was the shadow of a laugh in her voice.

"Morning? That depends," growled Jim. He was being soothed in spite of himself, and in spite of the direfulness of their situation. But bad as the situation was, and would be in any case, he

could not deny the proposition that morning and daylight would make it better.

"But aren't you tired already? You must be." James turned closer to her, trying to read her face. "It was a long night of anxiety, even before we left the boat. Weren't you frightened?"

"Yes, of course; but I've been getting used to frights of late, if one *can* get used to them." Again there was the laugh in her voice, under all its seriousness, even when she added: "I'm not sure that this isn't safer than being on board the *Jeanne D'Arc*, after all!"

It was characteristic of James that he forebore to take advantage of the opening this speech offered. The possible reason of her abduction, her treatment on board the yacht, her relation to Monsieur Chatelard—it was all a mystery, but he could not, at that moment, seek to solve it. Her remark remained unanswered for a little time; at last he said: "Then the *Jeanne D'Arc* must have been pretty bad."

"It was," she said simply.

Jim wondered whether she knew more about the crime of which she was the victim than he knew, or if she had discovered aught concerning it while she was a prisoner on the yacht. Granting that her person was so valuable that a man of Monsieur Chatelard's caliber would commit a crime to get possession of it, why should he have abandoned her when there was plainly some chance of safety in the boats? He could not conceive of Monsieur Chatelard's risking his neck in an affair of gallantry; cupidity alone would account for his part in the drama. James went over and over the situation, as far as he understood it, but he did none of his thinking aloud. It flashed on his mind that Miss Redmond must already have separated him, in her thoughts, from the other people on the yacht; though perhaps her trust was instinctive, arising from her own need of help. How could she know that he had risked his neck twice, now, to follow the Vision?

Swimming slowly, with Agatha's hand at times on his shoulder, James turned his mind sharply to a consideration of their present position. They had been alternately swimming and floating, hoping to come upon the yacht. The darkness of the night was penetrable, so that they could see a fairly large circle of water about them, but there was no shadow of the *Jeanne D'Arc*. Save for the running surge of the waters, all was silence. The pale forerunners of dawn had appeared. Their swim after the boats of the *Jeanne D'Arc* had warmed their blood, so that for a while they were not conscious of the chill of the water. But as the minutes lengthened, one by one, fatigue and cold numbed their bodies. It was a test of endurance for a strong man; as for the girl, Jim wondered at her strength and courage. She swam superbly, with unhurried, steady strokes. If she grew chatteringly cold, she would start into a vigorous swim, shoulder to shoulder with James. If she lost her breath with the hard exercise, she would take his hand, "so as not to lose you," she would say, and rest on the breast of the waves. The wind dropped and the sea grew quiet, so that they were no more cruelly buffeted, but rocked up and down on its heaving bosom.

Once, while they were "resting" on the water, Agatha broke a long silence with, "I wonder—" but did not at once say what she wondered at. Jim said nothing, but she knew he was waiting and listening.

"Suppose this should be the Great Gateway," she said at last, very slowly, but quite cheerfully and naturally. "I am wondering what there is beyond."

"I've often wondered, too," said Jim.

"I've sometimes thought, and I've said it, too, that I was crazy to die, just to see what happens," Agatha went on, laughing a little at her own memories. "But I find I'm not at all eager for it, now, when it would be so easy to go under and not come up again. Are you?"

"No, I've never felt eager to die; least of all, now."

Agatha was silent a while.

"What do you think death means? Shall we be we to-morrow, say, provided we can't keep afloat?" she asked by and by.

"Why, yes, I think so," said Jim. "I don't know why or how, but I guess we go on somewhere; and I rather think our best moments here—our moments of happiness or heroism, if we ever have any—are going to be the regular thing." Jim laughed a little, partly at his own lame ending, and partly because he felt Agatha's hand closing more tightly over his. He didn't want her to get blue just yet, after her brave fight.

But Agatha wasn't blue. She answered thoughtfully: "That isn't a bad idea," and then cheerfully turned to a consideration of the possibilities of a rescue at dawn.

James had evolved a plan to wait till enough light came to enable them to reach the *Jeanne D'Arc*, if she was still afloat; then to climb aboard and hunt for provisions and life preservers or something to use for a raft. If he could do this, then they would be in a somewhat better plight, at least for a time. He prayed that the *Jeanne D'Arc* might still be alive.

The two talked little, leaving silences between them full of wonder. The details of life, the ordinary personalities, were blotted out. Without explanation or speech of any kind, they understood each other. They were not, in this hour, members of a complex and artificial society; they were not even man and woman; they were two souls stripped of everything but the need for fortitude and sweetness.

At last came the dawn. Slowly the blue curtain of night lifted, lifted, until it became the blue curtain of sky, endlessly far away and far above. A twinkling star looked down on the cup of ocean, glimmered a moment and was gone. The light strengthened. A pearly, iridescent quiver came upon the waters, repeating itself wave after wave, and heralded the coming of the Lord Sun over the great murmuring sea. As the light grew, they could see a constantly widening circle of ocean, of which they were the center. As they rose and fell with the waves, the horizon fell and rose to their vision, dim and undefined. Hand in hand they floated in vaporous silver.

"The day has come at last, thank God!" breathed James.

"Yes, thank God!" answered the girl.

"Are you very cold?"

"The sun will soon warm us."

"Where did you learn to swim?"

"In England, mostly at the Isle of Wight, but I'm not half such a dolphin as you are."

"Oh, well, boys have to swim, you know, and I was a boy once," Jim answered awkwardly. Presently he asked, and his voice was full of awe: "Have you ever seen the dawn—a dawn like this—before?"

"Never one like this," she whispered.

When daylight came, they found they had not traveled far from the scene of the night's disaster; or, if they had, the *Jeanne D'Arc* had drifted with them. She was still afloat, and just as the sun rose they saw her, apparently not far away, tossing rudderless to the waves. There was no sign of the ship's boats.

At the renewed miracle of light, and at sight of the yacht, Jimmy's hopes were reborn. His spirit bathed in the wonder of the day and was made strong again. The night with its horrors of struggle and its darkness was past, forgotten in the flush of hope that came with the light.

Together they struck out toward the yacht, fresh with new courage. Now that he could see plainly, Jim swam always a little behind Agatha, keeping a watchful eye. She still took the water gallantly, nose and closed mouth just topping the wave, like a spaniel. An occasional side-stroke would bring her face level to the water, with a backward smile for her companion. He gloried in her spirit, even while he feared for her strength.

It was a longer pull to the yacht than they had counted upon, a heavy tax on their powers of endurance. Jim came up to find Agatha floating on her back and put his hand under her shoulders, steadying her easily.

"Now you can really rest," he said.

"I've looked toward the horizon so long, I thought I'd look up, way up, for a change," she said cheerfully. "That's where the skylarks go, when they want to sing—straight up into heaven!"

"Doesn't it make you want to sing?"

She showed no surprise at the question.

"Yes, it does, almost. But just as I thought of the skylarks, I remembered something else; something that kept haunting me in the darkness all night—

> "'Master in song, good-by, good-by,
> Down to the dim sea-line—'

I thought something or somebody was surely lost down in 'the dim sea-line' last night."

"Who can tell? But I had a better thought than yours: Ulysses, like us, swimming over the 'wine-dark sea'! Do you remember it? 'Then two days and two nights on the resistless waves he drifted; many a time his heart faced death.'"

"That's not a bit better thought than mine; but I like it. And I know what follows, too. 'But when the fair-haired dawn brought the third day, then the wind ceased; there came a breathless calm; and close at hand he spied the coast, as he cast a keen glance forward, upborne on a great wave.' That's it, isn't it?"

"I don't know, but I hope it is. 'The wine-dark sea' and the 'rosy-fingered dawn' are all I

remember; though I'm glad you know what comes next. It's a good omen. But look at the yacht; she's acting strange!"

As the girl turned to her stroke, their attention was caught and held by the convulsions of the *Jeanne D'Arc*. There was a grim fascination in the sight.

It was obvious that she was sinking. While they had been resting, her hull had sunk toward the water-line, her graceful bulk and delicate masts showing strange against ocean and sky. Now she suddenly tipped down at her stern; her bow was thrown up out of the water for an instant, only to be drawn down again, slowly but irresistibly, as if she were pulled by a giant's unseen hand. With a sudden last lurch she disappeared entirely, and only widening circles fleetingly marked the place of her going.

The two in the water watched with fascinated eyes, filled with awe. When it was all over Agatha turned to her companion with a long-drawn breath. Jim looked as one looks whose last hope has failed.

"I could never have let you go aboard, anyway!" He loved her anew for that speech, but knew not how to meet her eyes.

"Well, Ulysses lost his raft, too!" he managed to say.

"He saw the sunrise, too, just as we have seen it; and he saw a distant island, 'that seemed a shield laid on the misty sea.' Let's look hard now, each time the wave lifts us. Perhaps we also shall see an island."

"We must swim harder; you are chilled through."

"Oh, no," she laughed. "I shivered at the thought of what a fright I must look. I always did hate to get my hair wet."

"You look all right to me."

They were able to laugh, and so kept up heart. They tried to calculate the direction the yacht had taken when she left port, and where the land might lie; and when they had argued about it, they set out to swim a certain way. In their hearts each felt that any calculation was futile, but they pretended to be in earnest. They could not see far, but they created for themselves a goal and worked toward it, which is of itself a happiness.

So they watched and waited, ages long. Hope came to them again presently. James, treading water, thrust up his head and scented the air.

"I smell the salt marsh, which means land!" He sniffed again. "Yes, decidedly!"

A moment later it was there, before their vision—that "shield laid on the misty sea" which was the land. Only it was not like a shield, but a rocky spit of coast land, with fir trees farther back. James made for the nearest point, though his heart shrank to see how far away it was. Fatigue and anxiety were taking their toll of his vigor. Neither one had breath to spare even for exultation that the land was in sight. Little by little Agatha grew more quiet, though not less brave. It took all her strength to fight the water—that mighty element which indifferently supports or engulfs the human atom. If she feared, she made no sign. Bravely she kept her heart, and carefully she saved her strength, swimming slowly, resting often, and wasting no breath in talk.

But more and more frequently her eyes rested wistfully on James, mutely asking him for help. He watched her minute by minute, often begging her to let him help her.

"Oh, no, not yet; I can go on nicely, if I just rest a little. There—thank you."

Once she looked at him with such pain in her eyes that he silently took her hands, placed them on his shoulder and carried her along with his stronger stroke. She was reassured by his strength, and presently she slipped away from him, smiling confidently again as she swam alongside.

"I'm all right now; but I suddenly thought, what if anything should happen to you, and I be left alone! Or what if I should get panicky and clutch you and drag you down, the way people do sometimes!"

"But I shan't leave you alone, and you're not going to do that!"

Agatha smiled, but could only say, "I hope not!"

She forged ahead a little, and presently had another moment of fright on looking round and finding that Jim had disappeared. He had suddenly dived, without giving her warning. He came up a second later, puffing and spitting the bitter brine; but his face was radiant.

"Rocks and seaweed!" he cried. "The land is near. Come; I can swim and take you, too, easily. And now I know certainly just which way to go. Come, come!"

Agatha heard it all, but this time she was unable to utter a word. Jim saw her stiff lips move in an effort to smile or speak, but he heard no voice.

"Keep up, keep up, dear girl!" he cried. "We'll soon be there. Try, *try* to keep up! Don't lose for a moment the thought that you are near land, that you are almost there. We *are* safe, you *can* go on—only a few moments more!"

Poor Agatha strove as Jim bade her, gallantly, hearing his voice as through a thickening wall; but she had already done her best, and more. She struggled for a few half-conscious moments; then suddenly her arms grew limp, her eyes closed, and her weight came upon Jim as that of a dead person. Then he set his teeth and nerved himself to make the effort of his life.

It is no easy thing to strain forward, swimming the high seas, bearing above the surface a load which on land would make a strong man stagger. One must watch one's burden, to guard against mishap; one must save breath and muscle, and keep an eye for direction, all in a struggle against a hostile element.

The goal still seemed incredibly far, farther than his strength could go. Yet he swam on, fighting against the heartbreaking thought that his companion had perhaps gone "down to the dim sea-line" in very truth. She had been so brave, so strong. She had buoyed up his courage when it had been fainting; she had fought splendidly against the last terrible inertia of exhaustion.

"Courage!" he told himself. "We must make the land!" But it took a stupendous effort. His strokes became unequal, some of them feeble and ineffective; his muscles ached with the strain; now and then a strange whirring and dizziness in his head caused him to wonder dimly whether he were above or below water. He could no longer swim with closed lips, but constantly threw his head back with the gasp that marks the spent runner.

Holding Agatha Redmond in front of him, with her head well above the water and her body partly supported by the life preserver, he swam sometimes with one hand, sometimes only with his legs. He dared not stop now, lest he be too late in reaching land or wholly unable to regather his force. The dizziness increased, and a sharp pain in his eyeballs recurred again and again. He could no longer see the land; it seemed to him that it was blood, not brine, that spurted from nose and mouth; but still he swam on, holding the woman safe. He made a gigantic effort to shout, though he could scarcely hear his own voice. Then he fixed his mind solely on his swimming, counting one stroke after another, like a man who is coaxing sleep.

How long he swam thus, he did not know; but after many strokes he was conscious of a sense of happiness that, after all, it wasn't necessary to reach land or to struggle any more. Rest and respite from excruciating effort were to be had for the taking—why had he withstood them so long? The sea rocked him, the surge filled his ears, his limbs relaxed their tension. Then it was that a strong hand grasped him, and a second later the same hand dealt him a violent blow on the face.

He had to begin the intolerable exertion of swimming again, but he no longer had a burden to hold safe; there was no burden in sight. Half-consciously he felt the earth once more beneath his feet, but he could not stand. He fell face forward into the water again at his first attempt; and again the strong hand pulled him up and half-carried him over some slimy rocks. It was an endless journey before the strong hand would let him sit or lie down, but at last he was allowed to drop.

He vaguely felt the warmth of the sun drying his skin while the sea hummed in his ears; he felt distinctly the sharp pain between his eyes, and a parching thirst. He groped around in a delirious search for water, which he did not find; he pressed his head and limbs against the earth in an exquisite relief from pain; and at last his bruised feet, his aching bones and head constrained him to a lethargy that ended in sleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP ON THE BEACH

Sunset of the day that had dawned so strangely and wonderfully for those two wayfarers of earth, James and Agatha, fell on a little camp near the spit of coast-land toward which they had struggled. The point lifted itself abruptly into a rocky bank which curved in and out, yielding to the besieging waves. Just here had been formed a little sandy cove partly protected by the beetling cliff. At the top was verdure in abundance. Vines hung down over the face of the wall, coarse grasses and underbrush grew to its very edge, and sharp-pointed fir trees etched themselves against the clear blue of the sky. Below, the white sand formed a sickle-shaped beach, bordered by the rocky wall, with its sharp point dipping far out to sea. High up on the sand a

small rowboat was beached. There was no path visible up from the shingle, but it was evident that the ascent would be easy enough.

Nevertheless, the campers did not attempt it. Instead, they had made a fire of driftwood on the sand out of reach of the highest tide. Near the fire they had spread fir boughs, and on this fragrant couch James was lying. He was all unconscious, apparently, of the primitive nature of his surroundings, the sweetness of his balsam bed, and the watchful care of his two nurses.

Jim was in a bad way, if one could trust the remarks of his male nurse, who spoke to an invisible companion as he gathered chips and other bits of wood from the beach. He was a young, businesslike fellow with a clean, wholesome face, dressed only in gauze shirt, trousers, and boots without stockings; this lack, of course, was not immediately apparent. The tide had just turned after the ebb, and he went far down over the wet sand, sometimes climbing over the rocks farther along the shore until he was out of sight of the camp.

Returning from one of these excursions, which had been a bit longer than he intended, he looked anxiously toward the fire before depositing his armful of driftwood. The blaze had died down, but a good bed of coals remained; and upon this the young man expertly built up a new fire. It crackled and blazed into life, throwing a ruddy glow over the shingle, the rocks behind, and the figure lying on the balsam couch. James's face was waxen in its paleness, save for two fiery spots on his cheeks; and as he lay he stirred constantly in a feverish unrest. His bare feet were nearest the fire; his blue woollen trousers and shirt were only partly visible, being somewhat covered by a man's tweed coat.

The fire lighted up, also, the figure of Agatha Redmond. She was kneeling at the farther end of Jim's couch, laying a white cloth, which had been wet, over his temples. Her long dark hair was hanging just as it had dried, except that it was tied together low in the back with a string of slippery seaweed. Her neck was bare, her feet also; her loose blouse had lost all semblance of a made-to-order garment, but it still covered her; while a petticoat that had once been black satin hung in stiff, salt-dried creases from her waist to a little below her knees. She had the well-set head and good shoulders, with deep chest, which make any garb becoming; her face was bonny, even now, clouded as it was with anxiety and fatigue. She greeted the young man eagerly on his return.

"If you could only find a little more fresh water, I am sure it would help. The milk was good, only he would take so little. I think I shall have to let you go this evening to hunt for the farm-house."

"Yes, Mademoiselle," the young man replied. He had wanted to go earlier in the day, but the man was too ill and the woman too exhausted to be left alone. He went on speaking slowly, after a pause. "I can find the farm-house, I am sure, only it may take a little time. Following the cattle would have been the quickest way; but I can find the cowpath soon, even as it is. If you wouldn't be uneasy with me gone, Mademoiselle!"

"Oh, no, we shall be all right now, till you can get back!" As she spoke, Agatha's eyes rested questioningly on the youth who, ever since she had revived from her faint of exhaustion, had teased her memory. He had seen them struggling in the sea, and had swum out to her aid, she knew; and after leaving her lying on a slimy, seaweed-covered rock, he had gone out again and brought in her companion in a far worse condition than herself. The young man, also, was a survivor of the *Jeanne D'Arc*, having come from the disabled craft in the tiny rowboat that was now on the beach. More than this she did not know, yet something jogged her memory every now and then—something that would not shape itself definitely. Indeed, she had been too much engrossed in the serious condition of her companion and the work necessary to make the camp, to spend any thought on unimportant speculations.

But now, as she listened to the youth's respectful tones, it suddenly came back to her. She looked at him with awe-struck eyes.

"Oh, now I know! You are the new chauffeur; 'queer name, Hand!' Yes, I remember—I remember."

"What you say is true, Mademoiselle."

He stood before her, a stubbornly submissive look on his face, as a servant might stand before his betrayed master. It was as if he had been waiting for that moment, waiting for her anger to fall on him. But Agatha was speechless at her growing wonder at the trick fate had played them. Her steady gaze, serious and earnest now, without a hint of the laughter that usually came so easily, dwelt on the young man's eyes for a moment, then she turned away as if she were giving up a puzzling question. She looked at James, whose stubbly-bearded face was now quiet against its green pillow, as if seeking a solution there; but she had to fall back, at last, on the youth.

"Do you know who this man is?" she asked irrelevantly.

"No, Mademoiselle. He was picked up in New York harbor, the night we weighed anchor. I have not seen him since until to-day."

"'The night we weighed anchor!' What night was that?"

"Last Monday, Mademoiselle; at about six bells."

"And what day is to-day?"

"Saturday, Mademoiselle; and past four bells now."

"Monday—Saturday!" Agatha looked abstractedly down on Jimmy asleep, while upon her mind crowded the memories of that week. This man who had dragged her and her rescuer from the water, who had made fire and a bed for them, who had got milk for their sustenance, had been almost the last person her conscious eyes had seen in that half-hour of terror on the hillside. Her next memory, after an untold interval, was the rocking of the ship, an old woman who treated her obsequiously, a man who was her servile attendant and yet her jailer—but then, suddenly, as she knelt there, mind and body refused their service. She crumpled down on the soft sand, burying her head in her arms.

Hand came nearer and bent awkwardly over her, as if to coax her confidence.

"It's all right now, Mademoiselle. Whatever you think of me, you can trust me to do my best for you now."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you now," Agatha moaned in a muffled voice. "Only I'm so puzzled by it all—and so tired!"

"'Twas a fearful strain, Mademoiselle. But I can make you a bed here, so you can sleep."

Agatha shook her head. "I can sleep on the sand, just as well."

"I think, Mademoiselle, I'd better be going above and look for help from the village, as soon as I've supplied the fire. I'll leave these few matches, too, in case you need them."

"Yes, you'd better go, Hand; and wait a minute, until I think it out." Agatha sat up and pressed her palm to her forehead, straining to put her mind upon the problem at hand. "Go for a doctor first, Hand; then, if you can, get some food—bread and meat; and, for pity's sake, a cloak or long coat of some kind. Then find out where we are, what the nearest town is, and if a telegraph station is near. And stay; have you any money?"

"A little, Mademoiselle; between nine and ten dollars."

"That is good; it will serve for a little while. Please spend it for me; I will pay you. As soon as we can get to a telegraph station I can get more. Get the things, as I have said; and then arrange, if you can, for a carriage and another man, besides yourself and the doctor, to come down as near this point as possible. You two can carry him"—she looked wistfully at James—"to the carriage, wherever it is able to meet us. But you will need to spend money to get all these things; especially if you get them to-night, as I hope you may."

"I will try, Mademoiselle." The ex-chauffeur stood hesitating, however. At last, "I hate to leave you here alone, with only a sick man, and night coming on," he said.

"You need not be afraid for me," replied Agatha coldly. Her nerves had given way, now that the need for active exertion was past, and were almost at the breaking point. It came back to her again, moreover, how this man and another had made her a prisoner in the motor-car, and at the moment she felt foolish in trusting to him for further help. It came into her mind that he was only seeking an excuse to run away, in fear of being arrested later. A second time she looked up into his eyes with her serious, questioning gaze.

"I don't know why you were in the plot to do as you did—last Monday afternoon," she said slowly; "but whatever it was, it was unworthy of you. You are not by nature a criminal and a stealer of women, I know. And you have been kind and brave to-day; I shall never forget that. Do you really mean now to stay by me?"

Hand's gaze was no less earnest than her own; and though he flinched at "criminal," his eyes met hers steadily.

"As long as I can help you, Mademoiselle, I will do so."

At his words, spoken with sincerity, Agatha's spirit, tired and overwrought as it was, rose for an instant to its old-time buoyancy. She smiled at him.

"You mean it?" she asked. "Honest true, cross your heart?"

Hand's businesslike features relaxed a little. "Honest true, cross my heart!" he repeated.

"All right," said Agatha, almost cheerfully. "And now you must go, before it gets any darker. Don't try to return in the night, at the risk of losing your way. But come as soon as you can after daylight; and remember, I trust to you! Good-by."

Hand already, earlier in the day, had made a path for himself up the steep bank through the underbrush, and now Agatha went with him to the edge of the thicket. She watched and listened until the faint rustling of his footsteps ceased, then turned back to the camp on the beach. She went to the fire and stirred up its coals once more before returning to James. He was sleeping, but his flushed face and unnatural breathing were signs of ill. Now and then he moved restlessly, or seemed to try to speak, but no coherent words came. She sat down to watch by him.

After Agatha and James had been brought ashore by the capable Mr. Hand, it had needed only time to bring Agatha back to consciousness. Both she and James had practically fainted from exhaustion, and James had been nearly drowned, at the last minute. Agatha had been left on the rocks to come to herself as she would, while Hand had rubbed and pummeled and shaken James until the blood flowed again. It had flowed too freely, indeed, at some time during his ordeal; and tiny trickles of blood showed on his lips. Agatha, dazed and aching, was trying to crawl up to the sand when Hand came back to her, running lightly over the slippery rocks. They had come in on the flowing tide, which had aided them greatly; and now Hand helped her the short distance to the cove and mercifully let her lie, while he went back to his work for James.

Later he had got a little bucket, used for bailing out the rowboat, and dashed hurriedly into the thicket above after some tinkling cowbells. Though she was too tired to question him, Agatha supposed he had tied one of the cows to a tree, since he returned three or four times to fill the pail. What a wonderful life-giver the milk was! She had drunk her fill and had tried to feed it to James, who at first tasted eagerly, but had, on the whole, taken very little. He was only partly awake, but he shivered and weakly murmured that he was cold. Agatha quickly grew stronger; and she and Hand set to work to prepare the fire and the bed. Almost while they were at this labor, the sun had gone down.

Sitting by Jim's couch, Agatha grew sleepy and cold, but there were no more coverings. Hand's coat was over Jim, and as Agatha herself felt the cold more keenly she tucked it closer about him. Alone as she was now, in solitude with this man who had saved her from the waters, with darkness and the night again coming on, her spirit shrank; not so much from fear, as from that premonition of the future which now and then assails the human heart.

As she knelt by Jim's side, covering his feet with the coat and heaping the fir boughs over him, she paused to look at his unconscious face. She knew now that he did not belong to the crew of the *Jeanne D'Arc*; but of his outward circumstances she knew nothing more. Thirty she guessed him to be, thereby coming within four years of the truth. His short mustache concealed his mouth, and his eyes were closed. It was almost like looking at the mask of a face. The rough beard of a week's growth made a deep shadow over the lower part of his face; and yet, behind the mask, she thought she could see some token of the real man, not without his attributes of divinity. In the ordeal of the night before he had shown the highest order of patience, endurance and courage, together with a sweetness of temper that was itself lovable. But beyond this, what sort of man was he? Agatha could not tell. She had seen many men of many types, and perhaps she recognized James as belonging to a type; but if so, it was the type that stands for the best of New England stock. In the centuries back it may have brought forth fanatics and extremists; at times it may have built up its narrow walls of prejudice and pride; but at the core it was sound and manly, and responsive to the call of the spirit.

Something of all this passed through Agatha's mind, as she tried to read Jim's face; then, as he stirred uneasily and tried to throw off the light boughs that she had spread over him, she got up and went to the edge of the water to moisten afresh the bandage for his forehead. Involuntarily she shuddered at sight of the dark water, though the lapping waves, pushing up farther and farther with the incoming tide, were gentle enough to soothe a child.

She hurried back to Jim's couch and laid the cooling compress across his forehead. The balsam boughs about them breathed their fragrance on the night air, and the pleasant gloom rested their tired eyes. Gradually he quieted down again; his restlessness ceased. The long twilight deepened into darkness, or rather into that thin luminous blue shade which is the darkness of starlit summer nights. The sea washed the beach with its murmuring caress; somewhere in the thicket above a night-bird called.

In a cranny of the rocks Agatha hollowed out the sand, still warm beneath the surface here where the sun had lain on it through long summer days, and made for herself a bed and coverlet and pillow all at once. With the sand piled around and over her, she could not really suffer; and she was mortally tired.

She looked up toward the clear stars, Vega and the jeweled cross almost in the zenith, and ruddy Antares in the body of the shining Scorpion. They were watching her, she thought, to-night in her peace as they had watched her last night in her struggle, and as they would watch after all her days and nights were done. And then she thought no more. Sleep, blessed gift, descended upon her.

CHAPTER X

THE HEART OF YOUTH

"Agatha Redmond, can you hear me?"

She caught the voice faintly, as if it were a child's cry.

"I'm right here, yes; only wait just a second." She could not instantly free herself from her sandy coverings, but she was wide awake almost at the first words James had spoken. Faint as the voice had been, she recognized the natural tones, the strongest he had uttered since coming out of the water.

The night had grown cold and dark, and at first she was a trifle bewildered. She was also stiff and sore, almost beyond bearing. She had to creep along the sand to where Jim lay. The fire had burned wholly out, and the sand felt damp as she crawled over it. When she came near, she reached out her hand and laid it on Jim's forehead. He was shivering with cold.

"You poor man! And I sleeping while I ought to be taking care of you! I'll make the fire and get some milk; there is still a little left."

As she tried to make her aching bones lift her to her feet, she became aware that the man was fumbling at his coverings and trying to say something.

She bent down to hear his words, which were incredibly faint.

"I don't want any fire or any milk. I only wanted to know if you were there," he said diffidently, as if ashamed of his childishness.

She leaned over him, speaking gently and touching his head softly with her firm, cool hands.

"You're a little better now, aren't you, after your sleep? Don't you feel a little stronger?"

"Yes, I'm better, lots better," he whispered. "I must have been sleeping for ages. When I woke up I thought I had a beastly chill or something; but I'm all right now; only suddenly I felt as if I must know if you were there, and if it *was* you."

He smiled at his own words, and Agatha was reassured.

"I think you'll be still better for a little milk," she said, and crept away to get the pail, which had been hidden on a shelf of rock. When she came back with it, James tried manfully to sit up; but Agatha slipped an arm under his neck, in skilful nurse fashion, and held the bucket while he drank, almost greedily. As he sank back on his bed he whispered: "You are very good to take care of me."

"Oh, no; I'm only too glad! And now I'm going to build up the fire again; your hands are quite cold."

"No, don't go," he pleaded. "Please stay here; I'm not cold any more. And you must go to sleep again. I ought not to have wakened you; and, really, I didn't mean to."

"Yes, you ought. I've had lots of sleep; I don't want any more."

"It's dark, but it's better than it was that other night, isn't it?" said James.

"Much better," answered Agatha.

James visibly gathered strength from the milk, and presently he took some more. Agatha watched, and when he had finished, patted him approvingly on the hand, "Good boy! You've done very well," she cried.

"I was so thirsty, I thought the whole earth had run dry. Will you think me very ungrateful if I say now I wish it had been water?"

"Oh, no; I wish so, too. But Mr. Hand could only get us a little bit from a spring, for there isn't any other pail."

It was some time before Jim made out to inquire, "Who's Mr. Hand?"

"He's the man that helped us—out of the water—when we became exhausted."

Agatha hesitated to speak of the night's experience, uncertain how far Jim's memory carried him, and not knowing how a sick man, in his weakness, might be affected. Still, now that he seemed almost himself again, save for the chill, she ventured to refer to the event, speaking in a matter-of-fact way, as if such endurance tests were the most natural events in the world. James' speech was quite coherent and distinct, but very slow, as if the effort to speak came from the depths of a profound fatigue.

"Hand—that's a good name for him. I thought it was the hand of God, which plucked me, like David, or Jonah, or some such person, out of the seething billows. But I didn't think of there being a man behind." Then, after a long silence, "Where is he?"

"He's gone off to find somebody to help us get away from here: a carriage or wagon of some sort, and some food and clothes."

Something caused Jim to ejaculate, though quite feebly, "You poor thing!" And then he asked, very slowly, "Where is 'here'?"

"I don't know; and Mr. Hand doesn't know."

"And we've lost our tags," laughed Jim faintly.

Agatha couldn't resist the laugh, though the weakness in Jim's voice was almost enough to make her weep as well.

"Yes, we've lost our tags, more's the pity. Mr. Hand thinks we're either on the coast of Maine, of on an island somewhere near the coast. I myself think it must at least be Nova Scotia, or possibly Newfoundland. But Hand will find out and be back soon, and then we'll get away from here and go to some place where we'll all be comfortable."

Agatha stole away, and with much difficulty succeeded in kindling the fire again. She tended it until a good steady heat spread over the rocks, and then returned to James. She curled up, half sitting, half lying, against the rocks.

Clouds had risen during the recent hours, and it was much darker than the night before had been. The ocean, washing its million pebbles up on the little beach, moaned and complained incessantly. In the long intervals between their talk, Agatha's head would fall, her eyes would close, and she would almost sleep; but an undercurrent of anxiety concerning her companion kept her always at the edge of consciousness. James himself appeared to have no desire to sleep. He was trying to piece together, in his mind, his conscious and unconscious memories. At last he said:

"I guess I haven't been much good—for a while—have I?"

Agatha considered before replying. "You were quite exhausted, I think; and we feared you might be ill."

"And Handy Andy got my job?" She laughed outright at this, as much for the feeling of reassurance it gave her as for the jest itself.

"Handy Andy certainly *had* a job, with us two on his hands!" she laughed.

"I bet he did!" cried James, with more vigor than he had shown before. "He's a great man; I'm for him! When's he coming back?"

"Early in the morning, I hope," said Agatha, swallowing her misgivings.

"That's good," said James. "I think I'll be about and good for something myself by that time."

There was another long pause, so long that Agatha thought James must have gone to sleep again. He thought likewise of her, it appeared; for when he next spoke it was in a careful whisper:

"Are you still awake, Agatha Redmond?"

"Yes, indeed; quite. Do you want anything?"

"Yes, a number of things. First, are you quite recovered from the trouble—that night's awful trouble?" He seemed to be wholly lost as to time. "Did you come off without any serious injury? Do you look like yourself, strong and rosy-cheeked again?"

Agatha replied heartily to this, and her answer appeared to satisfy James for the moment. "Though," she added, "here in the dark, who can tell whether I have rosy cheeks or not?"

"True!" sighed James, but his sigh was not an unhappy one. Presently he began once more: "I want to know, too, if you weren't surprised that I knew your name?"

"Well, yes, a little, when I had time to think about it. How *did* you know it?"

James laughed. "I meant to keep it a secret, always; but I guess I'll tell, after all—just you. I got it from the program, that Sunday, you know."

"Ah, yes, I understand." She didn't quite understand, at first; for there had been other Sundays and other songs. But she could not weary him now with questions.

As they lay there the slow, monotonous susurrus of the sea made a deep accompaniment to their words. It was near, and yet immeasurably far, filling the universe with its soft but insistent

sound and echoes of sound. At the back of her mind, Agatha heard it always, low, threatening, and strong; but on the surface of her thoughts, she was trying to decide what she ought to do. She was thinking whether she might question her companion a little concerning himself, when he answered her, in part, of his own accord.

"You couldn't know who I am, of course: James Hambleton, of Lynn. Jim, Jimmy, Jimsy, Bud—I'm called most anything. But I wanted to tell you—in fact, that's what I waked up expressly for—I wanted to tell you—"

He paused so long, that Agatha leaned over, trying to see his face. The violence of the chill had passed. His eyes were wide open, his face alarmingly pale. She felt a sudden qualm of pain, lest illness and exhaustion had wrought havoc in his frame deeper than she knew. But as she bent over him, his features lighted up with his rare smile—an expression full of happiness and peace. He lifted a hand, feebly, and she took it in both her own. She felt that thus, hand in hand, they were nearer; that thus she could better be of help to him.

"I wanted to tell you," he began again, "that whatever happens, I'm glad I did it."

"Did what, dear friend?" questioned Agatha, thinking in her heart that the fever had set his wits to wandering.

"Glad I followed the Face and the Voice," he answered feebly. Agatha watched him closely, torn with anxiety. She couldn't bear to see him suffer—this man who had so suddenly become a friend, who had been so brave and unselfish for her sake, who had been so cheerful throughout their night of trouble.

"I told old Aleck," James went on, "that I'd have to jump the fence; but that was ages ago. I've been harnessed down so long, that I thought I'd gone to sleep, sure enough." Agatha thought certainly that now he was delirious, but she had no heart to stop his gentle earnestness. He went on: "But you woke me up. And I wouldn't have missed this last run, not for anything. 'Twas a great night, that night on the water, with you; and whatever happens, I shall always think *that* worth living for; yes, well worth living for."

James's voice died away into incoherence and at last into silence. Agatha, holding his hands in hers, watched him as he sank away from her into some realm whither she could not follow. Either his hour of sanity and calmness had passed, and fever had taken hold upon his system; or fatigue, mental and physical, had overpowered him once more. Presently she dropped his hand gently, looked to the coverings of his couch, and settled herself down again to rest.

But no more sleep came to her eyes that night. She thought over all that James had said, remembering his words vividly. Then her thoughts went back over the years, recalling she knew not what irrelevant matters from the past. Perhaps by some underlying law of association, there came to her mind, also, the words of the song she had sung on the Sunday which James had referred to—

> "Free of my pain, free of my burden of sorrow,
> At last I shall see thee—"

What ages it was since she had sung that song! And this man, this James Hambleton, it appeared, had heard her sing it; and somehow, by fate, he had been tossed into the same adventure with herself.

Unconsciously, Agatha's generous heart began to swell with pride in James's strength and courage, with gratitude for his goodness to her, and with an almost motherly pity for his present plight. She would admit no more than that; but that, she thought, bound her to him by ties that would never break. He would always be different to her, by reason of that night and what she chose to term his splendid heroism. She had seen him in his hour of strength, that hour when the overman makes half-gods out of mortals. It was the heart of youth, plus the endurance of the man, that had saved them both. It had been a call to action, dauntlessly answered, and he himself had avowed that the struggle, the effort, even the final pain, were "worth living for!" Thinking of his white face and feeble voice, she prayed that the high gods might not regard them worth dying for.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOME PORT

The darkness of the night slowly lifted, revealing only a gray, leaden sky. There was no dawn such as had gladdened their hearts the morning before, no fresh awakening of the day. Instead,

the coldness and gloom of the night seemed but to creep a little farther away, leaving its shadow over the world. A drizzling rain began to fall, and the wanderers on the beach were destined to a new draft of misery. Only Agatha watched, however; James gave no sign of caring, or even of knowing, whether the sun shone or hid its face.

He had slept fitfully since their hour of wakefulness together in the night, and several times he had shown signs of extreme restlessness. At these periods he would talk incoherently, Agatha being able to catch only a word now and then. Once he endeavored to get up, bent, apparently, upon performing some fancied duty far away. Agatha soothed him, talked to him as a mother talks to a sick child, cajoled and commanded him; and though he was restless and voluble, yet he obeyed her readily enough.

As the rain began to descend, Agatha bethought herself earnestly as to what could be done. She first persuaded James to drink a little more of the milk, and afterward took what was left herself—less than half a cupful. Then she set the bucket out to catch the rain. She felt keenly the need of food and water; and now that there was no one to heed her movements, she found it difficult to keep up the show of courage. She still trusted in Hand; but even at best he might yet be several hours in returning; and cold and hunger can reduce even the stoutest heart. If Hand did not return—but there was no answer to that *if*. She believed he would come.

The soft rain cast a pall over the ocean, so that only a small patch of sea was visible; and it flattened the waves until the blue-flashing, white-capped sea of yesterday was now a smooth, gray surface, touched here and there by a bit of frothy scum. Agatha looked out through the deep curtain of mist, remembering the night, the *Jeanne D'Arc*, and her recent peril. Most vividly of all she heard in her memory a voice shouting, "Keep up! I'm coming, I'm coming!" Ah, what a welcome coming that had been! Was he to die, now, here on her hands, after the worst of their struggle was over? She turned quickly back to James, vowing in her heart it should not be; she would save him if it lay in human power to save.

Her hardest task was to move their camp up into the edge of the brushwood, where they might have the shelter of the trees. There was a place, near the handle of the sickle, where the rock-wall partly disappeared, and the undergrowth from the cliff reached almost to the beach. It was from here that Hand had begun his ascent; and here Agatha chose a place under a clump of bayberry, where she could make another bed for James. The ground there was still comparatively dry.

She coaxed James to his feet and helped him, with some difficulty, up to the more sheltered spot. He was stronger, physically, now in his delirium than he had been during his period of sanity in the night. She made him sit down while she ran back to gather an armful of the fir boughs to spread out for his bed; but she had scarcely started back for the old camp before James got to his feet and staggered after her. She met him just as she was returning, and had to drop her load, take her patient by the arm, and guide him back to the new shelter. He went peacefully enough, but leaned on her more and more heavily, until at last his knees weakened under him and he fell. Agatha's heart smote her.

They were near the bayberry bush, though entirely out from its protection. As the drizzling rain settled down thicker and thicker about them, Agatha tried again. Slowly she coaxed James to his knees, and slowly, she helped him creep, as she had crept toward him in the night, along between the stones and up into the sheltered corner under the bayberry. It was only a little better than the open, and it had taken such prodigies of strength to get there!

Agatha made a pillow for James's head and sat by him, looking earnestly at his flushed face; and from her heart she sighed, "Ah, dear man, it was too hard! It was too hard!"

It was a long and weary wait for help, though help of a most efficient kind was on the way. Agatha had been looking and listening toward the upper wood, whither Hand had disappeared. She had even called, from time to time, on the chance that she could help to guide the assisting party back to the cove. At last, as she listened for a reply to her call, she heard another sound that set her wondering; it was the p-p-peter-peter of a motor-boat. She looked out over the small expanse of ocean that was visible to her, but could see nothing. Nevertheless the boat was approaching, as its puffing proclaimed. It grew more and more distinct, and presently a strong voice shouted "Ahoy! Are you there?"

Three times the shout came. Agatha made a trumpet of her hands and answered with a call on two notes, clear and strong. "All right!" came back; and then, "Call again! We can't find you!" And so she called again and again, though there were tears in her eyes and a lump in her throat for very relief and joy. When her eyes cleared, she saw the boat, and watched while it anchored well off the rocks; then two men put ashore in a rowboat.

"And where are our patients?" came a deep, steady voice from the rocks.

"This way, sir. I think mademoiselle has moved the camp up under the trees," was the reply, unmistakably the voice of Mr. Hand.

And there they found Agatha, kneeling by James and trying to coax him to his feet. "Quick, they have come! You will be cared for now, you will be well again!" she was saying. She saw

Hand approach and heard him say: "This way, Doctor Thayer. The gentleman is up here under the trees," and then, for the first time in all the long ordeal, Agatha's nerves broke and her throat filled with sobs. As the ex-chauffeur came near, she reached a hand up to him, while with the other she covered her weeping eyes in shame.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come! I'm so glad you've come!" she tried to say, but it was only a whisper through her sobs.

"I'm sorry I was gone so long," said Hand, touching her timidly on the shoulder.

"Tell the doctor to take care of him," she begged in the faintest of voices; and then she crept away, thinking to hide her nerves until she should come to herself again. But Hand followed her to the niche in the rocks where she fled, covered her with something big and warm, and before she knew it he had made her drink a cup that was comforting and good. Then he gave her food in little bits from a basket, and sweet water out of a bottle. Agatha's soul revived within her, and her heart became brave again, though she still felt as if she could never move from her hard, damp resting-place among the rocks.

"You stay there, please, Mademoiselle," adjured Mr. Hand. "When we get the boat ready, I'll come for you." Then, standing by her in his submissive way, he added a thought of his own: "It's very hard, Mademoiselle, to see you cry!"

"I'm not crying," shrieked Agatha, though her voice was muffled in her arms.

"Very well, Mademoiselle," acquiesced the polite Hand, and departed.

Two men could not have been found who were better fitted for managing a relief expedition than Hand and Doctor Thayer. Agatha found herself, after an unknown period of time, sitting safe under the canvas awning of the launch, protected by a generous cloak, comforted with food and stimulant, and relieved of the pressing anxiety, that had filled the last hours in the cove.

She had, in the end, been quite unable to help; but the immediate need for her help was past. Doctor Thayer, coming with his satchel of medicines, had at first given his whole attention to James, examining him quickly and skilfully as he lay where Agatha had left him. Later he came to Agatha with a few questions, which she answered clearly; but James, left alone, immediately showed such a tendency to wander around, following the hallucinations of his brain, that the doctor decided that he must have a sedative before he could be taken away. The needle, that friend of man in pain, was brought into use; and presently they were able to leave the cove. Doctor Thayer and Mr. Hand carried James to the rowboat, and the engineer, who had stayed in the launch, helped them lift him into the larger boat. "No more walking at present for this man!" said the doctor.

They were puffing briskly over the water, with the tiny rowboat from the *Jeanne D'Arc* and the boat belonging to the launch cutting a long broken furrow behind them. Mr. Hand was minding the engine, while the engineer and owner of the launch, Little Simon—so-called probably because he was big—stood forward, handling the wheel. Jim was lying on some blankets and oilskins on the floor of the boat, the doctor sitting beside him on a cracker-box. Agatha, feeling useless and powerless to help, sat on the narrow, uncomfortable seat at the side, watching the movements of the doctor. She was unable to tell whether doubt or hope prevailed in his rugged countenance.

At last she ventured her question; but before replying Doctor Thayer looked up at her keenly, as if to judge how much of the truth she would be able to bear.

"The hemorrhage was caused by the strain," he said at last, slowly. "It is bad enough, with this fever. If his constitution is sound, he may pull through."

Not very encouraging, but Agatha extracted the best from it. "Oh, I'm so thankful!" she exclaimed. Doctor Thayer looked at her, a deep interest showing in his grim old face. While she looked at James, he studied her, as if some unusual characteristic claimed his attention, but he made no comment.

Doctor Thayer was short in stature, massively built, with the head and trunk of some ancient Vulcan. His heavy, large features had a rugged nobility, like that of the mountains. His face was smooth-shaven, ruddy-brown, and deeply marked with lines of care; but most salient of all his features was the massively molded chin and jaw. His lips, too, were thick and full, without giving the least impression of grossness; and when he was thinking, he had a habit of thrusting his under jaw slightly forward, which made him look much fiercer than he ever felt. Thin white hair covered his temples and grew in a straggling fringe around the back of his head, upon which he wore a broad-brimmed soft black hat.

Doctor Thayer would have been noticeable, a man of distinction, anywhere; and yet here he was, with his worn satchel and his old-fashioned clothes, traveling year after year over the country-side to the relief of farmers and fishermen. He knew his science, too. It never occurred to him to doubt whether his sphere was large enough for him.

"I haven't found out yet where we are, or to what place we are going. Will you tell me, sir?"

asked Agatha.

"You came ashore near Ram's Head, one of the worst reefs on the coast of Maine; and we're heading now for Charlesport; that's over yonder, beyond that next point," Doctor Thayer answered. After a moment he added: "I know nothing about your misfortunes, but I assume that you capsized in some pesky boat or other. When you get good and ready, you can tell me all about it. In the meantime, what is your name, young woman?"

The doctor turned his searching blue eyes toward Agatha again, a courteous but eager inquiry underneath his brusque manner.

"It is a strange story, Doctor Thayer," said Agatha somewhat reluctantly; "but some time you shall hear it. I must tell it to somebody, for I need help. My name is Agatha Redmond, and I am from New York; and this gentleman is James Hambleton of Lynn—so he told me. He risked his life to save mine, after we had abandoned the ship."

"I don't doubt it," said Doctor Thayer gruffly. "Some blind dash into the future is the privilege of youth. That's why it's all recklessness and foolishness."

Agatha looked at him keenly, struck by some subtle irony in his voice. "I think it is what you yourself would have done, sir," she said.

The doctor thrust out his chin in his disconcerting way, and gave not the least smile; but his small blue eyes twinkled.

"My business is to see just where I'm going and to know exactly what I'm doing," was the dry answer. He turned a watchful look toward James, lying still there between them; then he knelt down, putting an ear over the patient's heart.

"All right!" he assured her as he came up. "But we never know how those organs are going to act." Satisfying himself further in regard to James, he waited some time before he addressed Agatha again. Then he said, very deliberately: "The ocean is a savage enemy. My brother Hercules used to quote that old Greek philosopher who said, 'Praise the sea, but keep on land.' And sometimes I think he was right."

Agatha's tired mind had been trying to form some plan for their future movements. She was uneasily aware that she would soon have to decide to do something; and, of course, she ought to get back to New York as soon as possible. But she could not leave James Hambleton, her friend and rescuer, nor did she wish to. She was pondering the question as the doctor spoke; then suddenly, at his words, a curtain of memory snapped up. "My brother Hercules" and "Charlesport!"

She leaned forward, looking earnestly into the doctor's face. "Oh, tell me," she cried impulsively, "is it possible that you knew Hercules Thayer? That he was your brother? And are we in the neighborhood of Ilion?"

"Yes—yes—yes," assented the doctor, nodding to each of her questions in turn; "and I thought it was you, Agatha Shaw's girl, from the first. But you should have come down by land!" he dictated grimly.

"Oh, I didn't intend to come down at all," cried Agatha; "either by land or water! At least not yet!"

Doctor Thayer's jaw shot out and his eyes shone, but not with humor this time. He looked distinctly irritated. "But my dear Miss Agatha Redmond, where *did* you intend to go?"

Agatha couldn't, by any force of will, keep her voice from stammering, as she answered: "I wasn't g-going anywhere! I was k-kidnapped!"

Doctor Thayer looked sternly at her, then reached toward his medicine chest. "My dear young woman—" (Why is it that when a person is particularly out of temper, he is constrained to say My *Dear* So and So?) "My dear young woman," said Doctor Thayer, "that's all right, but you must take a few drops of this solution. And let me feel your pulse."

"Indeed, Doctor, it is all so, just as I say," interrupted Agatha. "I'm not feverish or out of my head, not the least bit. I can't tell you the whole story now; I'm too tired—"

"Yes, that's so, my dear child!" said the doctor, but in such an evident tone of yielding to a delirious person, that he nearly threw her into a fever with anger. But on the whole, Agatha was too tired to mind. He took her hand, felt of her pulse, and slowly shook his head; but what he had to say, if he had anything, was necessarily postponed. The launch was putting into the harbor of Charlesport.

Even on the dull day of their arrival, Charlesport was a pleasant looking place, stretching up a steep hill beyond the ribbon of street that bordered its harbor. Fish-houses and small docks stood out here and there, and one larger dock marked the farthest point of land. A great derrick stood by one wharf, with piles of granite block near by. Little Simon was calling directions back

to Hand at the engine as they chugged past fishing smacks and mooring poles, past lobster-pot buoys and a little bug-lighthouse, threading their way into the harbor and up to the dock. Agatha appealed to the doctor with great earnestness.

"Surely, Doctor Thayer, it is a Providence that we came in just here, where people will know me and will help me. I need shelter for a little while, and care for my sick friend here. Where can we go?"

Doctor Thayer cast a judicial eye over the landscape, while he held his hat up into the breeze. "It's going to clear; it'll be a fine afternoon," said he. Then deliberately: "Why don't you go up to the old red house? Sallie Kingsbury's there keeping it, just as she did when Hercules was alive; waiting for you or the lawyer or somebody to turn her out, I guess. And it's only five miles by the good road. You couldn't go to any of these sailor shacks down here, and the big summer hotel over yonder isn't any place for a sick man, let alone a lady without her trunk."

Agatha looked in amazement at the doctor. "Go to the old red house—to stay?"

"Why not? If you're Agatha Redmond, it's yours, isn't it? And I guess nobody's going to dispute your being Agatha Shaw's daughter, looking as you do. The house is big enough for all creation; and, besides, they've been on pins and needles, waiting for you to come, or write, or do something." The doctor gave a grim chuckle. "Hercules surprised them all some, by his will. But they'll all be glad to see you, I guess, unless it is Sister Susan. She was always pretty hard on Hercules; and she didn't approve of the will—thought the house ought to go to the Foundling Asylum."

Agatha looked as if she saw the gates of Eden opened to her. "But could I really go there? Would it be all right? I've not even seen the lawyer." There was no need of answers to her questions; she knew already that the old red house would receive her, would be a refuge for herself and for James, who needed a refuge so sorely.

The doctor was already making his plans. "I'll drive this man here," indicating James, "and he'll need some one to nurse him for a while, too. You can go up in one of Simon Nash's wagons; and I'll get a nurse up there as soon as I can."

The launch had tied up to the larger dock, and Hand and Little Simon had been waiting some minutes while Agatha and the doctor conferred together. Now, as Agatha hesitated, the businesslike Hand was at her elbow. "I can help you, Mademoiselle, if you will let me. I have had some experience with sick men." Agatha looked at him with grateful eyes, only half realizing what it was he was offering. The doctor did not wait, but immediately took the arrangement for granted. He began giving orders in the tone of a man who knows just what he wants done, and knows also that he will be obeyed.

"You stay here, Mr. Hand, and help with this gentleman; and Little Simon, here, you go up to your father's livery stable and harness up, quick as you can. Then drive up to my place and get the boy to bring my buggy down here, with the white horse. Quick, you understand? Tell them the doctor's waiting."

Agatha sat in the launch while the doctor's orders were carried out. Little Simon was off getting the vehicles; Doctor Thayer had run up the dock to the village street on some errand, saying he would be back by the time the carriages were there; and Hand was walking up and down the dock, keeping a watchful eye on the launch. James was lying in the sheltered corner of the boat, ominously quiet. His eyes were closed, and his face had grown ghastly in his illness. Tears came to Agatha's eyes as she looked at him, seeing how much worse his condition was than when he had talked with her, almost happily, in the night. She herself felt miserably tired and ill; and as she waited, she had the sensation one sometimes has in waiting for a train; that the waiting would go on for ever, would never end.

The weather changed, as the doctor had prophesied, and the rain ceased. Fresh gusts of wind from the sea blew clouds of fog and mist inland, while the surface of the water turned from gray to green, from green to blue. The wind, blowing against the receding tide, tossed the foam back toward the land in fantastic plumes. Agatha, looking out over the sea, which now began to sparkle in the light, longed in her heart to take the return of the sunshine as an omen of good. It warmed and cheered her, body and soul.

As her eyes turned from the sea to the village tossed up beyond its highest tides, she searched, though in vain, for some spot which she could identify with the memories of her childhood. She must have seen Charlesport in some one of her numerous visits to Ilion as a child; but though she recalled vividly many of her early experiences, they were in no way suggestive of this tiny antiquarian village, or of the rocky hillside stretching off toward the horizon. A narrow road wound athwart the hill, leading into the country beyond. It was steep and rugged, and finally it curved over the distant fields.

But the old red house was the talisman that brought back to her mind the familiar picture. She wondered if it lay over the hill beyond that rugged road. She closed her eyes and saw the green fields, the mighty balm-of-gilead tree, the lilac bushes, and the dull red walls of the house standing back from the village street, not far from the white-steepled church. She could see it all,

plainly. The thought came to her suddenly that it was home. It was the first realization she had of old Hercules Thayer's kindness. It was Home for her who had else been homeless. She hugged the thought in thankfulness.

"Now, Miss Agatha Redmond, if you will come—"

The eternity had ended; and time, with its swift procession of hours and days, had begun again.

CHAPTER XII

SEEING THE RAINBOW

A few days on a yacht, with a calm sea and sun-cool weather, may be something like a century of bliss for a pair of lovers, if they happen to have taken the lucky hour. The conventions of yacht life allow a companionship from dawn till dark, if they choose to have it; there is a limited amount of outside distraction; if the girl be an outdoor lass, she looks all the sweeter for the wind rumpling her hair; and on shipboard, if anywhere, mental resourcefulness and good temper achieve their full reward.

Aleck had been more crafty than he knew when he carried Mélanie and Madame Reynier off on the *Sea Gull*. Almost at the last moment Mr. Chamberlain had joined them, Aleck's liking for the man and his instinct of hospitality overcoming his desire for something as near as possible to a solitude *à deux* with Mélanie.

They could not have had a better companion. Mr. Chamberlain was nothing less than perfect in his position as companion and guest. He enjoyed Madame Reynier's grand duchess manners, and spared himself no trouble to entertain both Madame Reynier and Mélanie. He was a hearty admirer, if not a suitor, of the younger woman; but certain it was, that, if he ever had entertained personal hopes in regard to her, he buried them in the depths of his heart by the end of their first day on the *Sea Gull*. He understood Aleck's position with regard to Mélanie without being told, and instantly brought all his loyalty and courtesy into his friend's service.

Madame Reynier had an interest in seeing the smaller towns and cities of America; "something besides the show places," she said. So they made visits ashore here and there, though not many. As they grew to feel more at home on the yacht, the more reluctant they were to spend their time on land. Why have dust and noise and elbowing people, when they might be cutting through the blue waters with the wind fresh in their faces? The weather was perfect; the thrall of the sea was upon them.

The roses came into Mélanie's cheeks, and she forgot all about the professional advice which she had been at such pains to procure in New York. There was happiness in her eyes when she looked on her lover, even though she had repulsed him. As for Mr. Chamberlain, he breathed the very air of content. Madame Reynier, with her inscrutable grand manner, confessed that she had never before been able precisely to locate Boston, and now that she had seen it, she felt much better. Even Aleck's lean bulk seemed to expand and flourish in the atmosphere of happiness about him. His sudden venture was a success, beyond a doubt. The party had many merry hours, many others full of a quiet pleasure, none that were heavy or uneasy.

If Aleck's outer man prospered in this unexpected excursion, it can only be said that his spiritual self flowered with a new and hitherto unknown beauty. It was a late flowering, possibly —though what are thirty-four years to Infinity?—but there was in it a richness and delicacy which was its own distinction and won its own reward.

Mélanie's words, spoken in their long interview in the New York home, had contained an element of truth. There was a poignant sincerity in her saying, "You do not love me enough," which touched Aleck to the center of his being. He was not niggardly by nature; and had he given stintingly of his affection to this woman who was to him the best? His whole nature shrank from such a role, even while he dimly perceived that he had been guilty of acting it. If he had been small in his gift of love, it was because he had been the dupe of his theories; he had forsworn gallantry toward women, and had unwittingly cast aside warmth of affection also.

But such a condition was, after all, more apparent than real. In his heart Aleck knew that he did love Mélanie "enough," however much that might be. He loved her enough to want, not only and not mainly, what she could give to him; but he wanted the happiness of caring for her, cherishing her, rewarding her faith with his own. She had not seen that, and it was his problem to make her see it. There was only one way. And so, in forgetting himself, forgetting his wants, his comforts, his studies and his masculine will—herein was the blossoming of Aleck's soul.

Mélanie instinctively felt the subtle change, and knew in her heart that Aleck had won the

day, though she still treated their engagement as an open question. Aleck would read to her in his simple, unaffected manner, sometimes with Madame Reynier and Mr. Chamberlain also for audience, sometimes to her alone. And since they lived keenly and loved, all books spoke to them of their life or their love. A line, a phrase, a thought, would ring out of the record, and each would be glad that the other had heard that thought; sometime they would talk it all over. They learned to laugh at their own whimsical prejudices, and then insisted on them all the harder; they learned, each from the other, some bit of robust optimism, some happiness of vision, some further reach of thought.

After they had read, they would play at quoits, struggling sternly against each other; or Chamberlain would examine Mélanie in nautical lore; or together, in the evening, they would trace the constellations in the heavens. During their first week they were in the edge of a storm for a night and a day; but they put into harbor where they were comfortable and safe, and merry as larks through it all.

So, day by day, Aleck hedged Mélanie about with his love. Was she thoughtful? He let her take, as she would, his thoughts, the best he could give from his mature experience. Was she gay? He liked that even better, and delighted to cap her gaiety with his own queer, whimsical drolleries. Whatever her mood, he would not let her get far from him in spirit. It was not in her heart to keep him from her; but Aleck achieved the supermundane feat of making his influence felt most keenly when she was alone. She dwelt upon him in her thoughts more intensely than she herself knew; and that intenseness was only the reflection of his own thought for her.

They had been sailing a little more than a week, changing the low, placid Connecticut fields for the rougher northern shores, going sometimes farther out to sea, but delighting most in the sweet, pine-fringed coast of Maine. There were no more large cities to visit, only small villages where fishermen gathered after their week's haul or where slow, primitive boat-building was still carried on. Most of the inhabitants of the coast country appeared to be farmers as well as fishermen, even where the soil was least promising. The aspect of the shores was that of a limited but fairly prosperous agricultural community. Under the shadow of the hills were staid little homes, or fresh-painted smart cottages. Sometimes a bold rock-bank formed the shore for miles and miles, and the hills would vanish for a space. Here and there were headlands formed by mighty boulders, against which the waves endlessly dashed and as endlessly foamed back into the sea.

Such a headland loomed up on their starboard one evening when the sun was low; and as the plumes of spray from the incoming waves rose high in the air a rainbow formed itself in the fleeting mist. It was a fairy picture, repeating itself two or three times, no more.

"That's my symbol of hope," said Aleck quite impersonally, to anybody who chose to hear.

Mr. Chamberlain turned to Aleck with his ready courtesy. "Not the only one you have received, I hope, on this charming voyage."

Madame Reynier was ready with her pleasant word. "Aren't we all symbols for you—if not of hope, then of your success as a host? We've lost our aches and our pains, our nerves and our troubles; all gone overboard from the *Sea Gull*."

"You're all tremendously good to me, I know that," said Aleck, his slow words coming with great sincerity.

Mélanie kept silence, but she remembered the rainbow.

The headland was the landward end of a small island, one part of which was thickly wooded. A large unused house stood in a clearing, evidently once a rather pretentious summer residence, though now there were many signs of delapidation. The pier on the beach had been almost entirely beaten down by storms, and a small, flimsy slip had taken its place, running far down into the water. A thin line of smoke rose from the chimney of one of the outbuildings; and while they looked and listened the raucous cry of a peacock came to them over the still water. Presently Chamberlain suggested:

"I feel it in my bones that there'll be lobsters over there to be had for the asking. I heard your man say he wanted lobsters, Van; and I believe I'll row over there and see. I'm feeling uncommonly fit and need some exercise."

"All right, I'll go too," said Aleck.

"I'll bet a bouquet that I beat you rowing over—Miss Reynier to furnish the bouquet!" was Chamberlain's next proposition. "Do you agree to that, my lady?"

"And pray, where should I get a bouquet?"

"Oh, the next time we get on land. And we won't put up with any old bouquet of juniper bushes and rocks, either. We want a good, old-fashioned round bouquet of garden posies, with mignonette round the edge and a rose in the middle; a sure-enough token of esteem—that kind of thing, you know. Is it a bargain, Miss Reynier?"

"Very well, it is a bargain," agreed Mélanie; "but I shall choose bachelors' buttons!"

So they took the tender and got off, with a great show of exactness as to time and strictness of rules. Madame Reynier was to hold the watch, and Aleck was to wave a white handkerchief the minute they touched sand. Mr. Chamberlain was to give a like signal when they started back. The yacht slowed down, and held her place as nearly as possible.

Chamberlain pulled a great oar, and was, in fact, far superior to Aleck in point of skill; but his stroke was not well adapted to the choppy waves inshore. He had learned it on the sleepy Cam, where the long, gliding blade counts best. The men stayed ashore a long time, disappearing entirely beyond the clump of trees that screened the outbuildings. When they reappeared, an old man was with them, following them down to the boat. Then the white handkerchief appeared, and the boat started on its return.

Aleck profited by Chamberlain's work, and made the boat leap forward by a shorter, almost jerky stroke. He came back easily with five minutes to spare.

"Good work!" said Mr. Chamberlain. "You have me beaten, and you'll get the bachelors' buttons; but you had the tide with you."

"Nonsense! I had the lobsters extra!" asserted Aleck.

"Well, if you had been born an Englishman, we'd make an oarsman out of you yet!"

"Huh!" said Aleck.

But they had news to tell the ladies, and while they were having their dinner their thoughts were turned to another matter. The island, it appeared, had for some years been abandoned by its owner, and its only inhabitant was a gray and grizzly old man, known to the region as the hermit. His fancy was to keep a light burning always by night in the landward window of his cabin, so as to warn sailors off the dangerous headland. There was no lighthouse in the vicinity, and by a kindly consent the people on the neighboring islands and on the mainland opposite encouraged his benevolent delusion, if delusion it might be called. They contrived to send him provisions at least once a week; and they had supplied him with a flag which, it was understood, he would fly in case he was in actual need. So, alone with his cow and his fowls, the old hermit spent his days, winter and summer, tending his lamp when the dark came on.

Aleck and Mr. Chamberlain had picked up some of this information at the last port which the *Sea Gull* made; but what was of new and real interest to them now was the story which the old man told them of a castaway on the island a few days before.

"All hands had abandoned the yacht just before she went down, it appears. The owner was robbed by his own men and marooned on the hermit's island—that's the gist of it," said Aleck.

"The hermit said the man wouldn't eat off his table," went on Mr. Chamberlain; "but asked him for raw eggs and ate them outdoors. Said that except when he asked for eggs he never spoke without cursing. At least, the hermit couldn't understand what he said, so he thought it was cursing. And while the old man was talking," added Chamberlain resentfully, "that blooming peacock squawked like a demon."

"The yacht that went down, according to the man, was the *Jeanne D'Arc*," said Aleck, who had been grave enough between all their light-hearted talk. "I didn't tell you, Chamberlain, that my cousin, my old chum, went off quite unexpectedly on a boat called the *Jeanne D'Arc*. Where he went or what for, I don't know. Of course, it may have been another *Jeanne D'Arc*; it probably was. But it troubles me."

Mélanie was instantly aroused. "Oh, I had an uncanny feeling when you first mentioned the *Jeanne D'Arc*!" she cried. "But could you not find out more? What became of the man that was marooned?"

"He got off the island a day or two ago," said Aleck. "The people that brought provisions to the old man took him to the mainland, to Charlesport."

"The beggar left without so much as thanking the old man for his eggs," added Chamberlain.

"We'll put into Charlesport to-night, if you don't mind," said Aleck. "If I can find the man that was marooned, I may be able to learn something about Jim, if he really was on the yacht. You can all go ashore, if you like. There's a big summer hotel near by, and it's a lovely country."

"We'll stay wherever it's most convenient for you to have us," said Mélanie, looking at Aleck; for once, with more than a friendly interest in her eyes.

"And perhaps I can help you, Van; two heads, you know," said Chamberlain.

Aleck, troubled as he was, could not help being grateful to his friends. So the *Sea Gull*, turned suddenly from her holiday mood, headed into the harbor of Charlesport.

The village still rang, if so staid a community could be said to ring, with reports of the event

of the week before. Doctor Thayer had been sphinx-like, and Little Simon had been imaginative and voluble; and it would have been difficult to say which had teased the popular curiosity the more. Aleck found a tale ready for his ears about the launch and its three passengers, with many conflicting details. Some said that a great singer had been wrecked off Ram's Head, others that it was the captain and mate of the *Jeanne D'Arc*, others that it was a daughter of old Parson Thayer's sweetheart and two sailors that came ashore. Little or nothing was known about the island castaway. Aleck followed the only clue he could find, thinking to get at least some inkling of the truth.

CHAPTER XIII

ALECK SEES A GHOST

Little Simon drove leisurely up the long, rugged hill over which Agatha and James had so recently traveled, and drew rein in the shade at a distance of a long city block from his destination. He pointed with his whip while he addressed Aleck, his sole passenger.

"Yonder's the old red house, Mister. The parson, he hated to have his trees gnawed, and Major here's a great horse for gnawing the bark offer trees. So I never go no nearer the house than this."

"All right, Simon; you wait for me here."

Aleck walked slowly along the country road, enjoying the fragrant fields, the quiet beauty of the place. It was still early in the day, for he had lost no time in following the clues gathered from the village as to the survivors of the *Jeanne D'Arc*. The air was fresh and clean, with a tang of the distant salt marshes.

A long row of hemlocks and Norway spruce bordered the road, and, with the aid of a stone wall, shut off from the highway a prosperous-looking vegetable garden. Farther along, a flower garden glowed in the fantastic coloring which gardens acquire when planted for the love of flowers rather than for definite artistic effects. Farther still, two lilac bushes stood sentinel on either side of a gateway; and behind, a deep green lawn lay under the light, dappled shade of tall trees. It was a lawn that spoke of many years of care; and in the middle of its velvet green, under the branches of two sheltering elms, stood the old red house. It looked comfortable and secure, in its homely simplicity; something to depend on in the otherwise mutable scenes of life. Aleck felt an instantaneous liking for it, and was glad that his errand, sad as it might possibly be, had yet led him thither.

Long French windows in the lower part of the house opened upon the piazza, and from the second story ruffled white curtains fluttered to the breeze. As the shield-shaped knocker clanged dully to Aleck's stroke, a large, melancholy hound came slowly round the corner of the house, approached the visitor with tentative wags of the tail, and after sniffing mildly, lay down on the cool grass. It wasn't a house to be hurried, that was plain. After a wait of five or ten minutes Aleck was about to knock again, when a face appeared at one of the side-lights of the door. Presently the door itself opened a few inches, and elderly spinsterhood, wrapped in severe inquiry, looked out at him.

"Can I see the lady, or either of the gentlemen, who recently arrived here from the yacht, the *Jeanne D'Arc*?"

Aleck's voice and manner were friendly enough to disarm suspicion itself; Sallie Kingsbury looked at him for a full second.

"Come in."

Aleck followed her into the wide, dim hall, and waited while she pulled down the shade of the sidelight which she had lifted for observation. Then she opened a door on the right and said:

"Set down in the parlor while I go and take my salt risin's away from the stove. I ain't had time to call my soul my own since the folks came, what with callers at all times of the day."

Sallie's voice was not as inhospitable as her words. She was mildly hurt and grieved, rather than offended. She disappeared and presently came back with a white apron on in place of the colored gingham she had worn before; but it is doubtful if Aleck noticed this tribute to his sex. Sallie looked withered and pinched, but more by nature and disposition than by age. She stood with arms akimbo near the center-table, regarding Aleck with inquisitiveness not unmixed with liking.

"You can set down, sir," she said politely, "but I don't know as you can see any of the folks. The man, he's up-stairs sick, clean out of his head; and the young man, he's nursing him. Can't

leave him alone a minute, or he'd be up and getting out the window, f'rall I know."

Aleck listened sympathetically. "A sad case! And what is the name, if I may ask, of the young man who is so ill?"

"Lor', I don't know," said Sallie. "The new mistress, her name's Redmond; some kin of Parson Thayer's, and she's got this house and a lot of money. The lawyer was here yesterday and got the will all fixed up. She's a singer, too—one of those opery singers down below, she is."

Sallie made this announcement as if she was relating a bewildering blow of Providence for which she herself was not responsible. Aleck, who began to fear that he might be the recipient of more confidences than decorum dictated, hastily proffered his next question.

"Can I see the lady, Miss Redmond? Or is it Mrs. Redmond?"

Sallie gave a scornful, injured sniff.

"*Miss* Redmond, sir, though she's old enough to be a Mrs. I wouldn't so much mind her coming in here and using the parson's china that I always washed with my own hands if she was a Mrs. But what can she, an unmarried woman and an opery singer, know about Parson Thayer's ways and keeping this house in order, when I've been with him going on seventeen years and he took me outer the Home when I was no more than a child?"

Aleck's heart would have been stone had he resisted this all but passionate plea.

"You have been faithfulness itself, I am sure. But do you think Miss Redmond would see me, at least for a few minutes?"

Sallie recovered her dignity, which had been near a collapse in tears, and assumed her official tone. "I don't know as you can, and I don't know *as* you can. She's sick, too; fell overboard somehow or other, offer one of those pesky boats, and got neuralagy and I don't know what all. But I'll go and see how she's feeling."

"Stay, wait a minute," said Aleck, seized with a new thought. "I'll write a message to Miss Redmond and then she'll know just what I want. If you'll be so good as to take it to her?"

"Why, certainly, of course I will," Said Sallie Kingsbury. "Only you needn't take all *that* trouble. I can tell her what you want myself." Sallie was one of those persons who regard the pen as the weapon of last resort, not to be used until necessity compels. But Aleck continued writing on a blank leaf of his note-book. The message was this:

"Can you give me any information concerning my cousin, James Hambleton, who was thought to be aboard the *Jeanne D'Arc*?"

He tore the leaf out, extracted a card from his pocketbook, and handed leaf and card to Sallie. "Will you please give those to Miss Redmond?"

Sallie wiped her hands, which were perfectly clean, on her white apron, took the card and bit of paper and departed, sniffing audibly. When she returned, it was to say, with a slightly more interested air, that Miss Redmond wished to see him up-stairs. She stood at the bottom of the wide stairway and pointed to a corner of the upper floor. "She's in there—room on the right!" and so she stalked off to the kitchen.

Aleck Van Camp sought the region indicated by Sallie's gaunt finger with some misgivings; but he was presently guided further by a clear voice.

"Come in this way, Mr. Van Camp, if you please!"

The voice led him to an open door, before which he stood, looking into a large, old-fashioned bedroom, from whose windows the white curtains fluttered in the breeze. Miss Redmond was propped up with pillows on a horsehair-covered lounge, which stood along the foot of a monstrous bed. She was clothed in some sort of wool wrapper, and over her feet was thrown a faded traveling rug. By her side stood a chair on which were writing materials, Aleck's note and card, and a half-written letter. Agatha sat up as she greeted Aleck.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Van Camp. Will you come in? I ask your pardon for not coming downstairs to see you, but I have been ill, and am not strong yet."

She was about to motion Aleck to a chair, but stopped in the midst of her speech, arrested by his expression. Aleck stood rooted to the door-sill, with a look of surprise on his face which amounted to actual amazement. Thus apparently startled out of himself, he regarded Agatha earnestly.

"Will you come in?" Agatha repeated at last.

"Pardon me," he said finally in his precise drawl, "but I confess to being startled. You—you bear such an extraordinary resemblance to some one I know, that I thought it must really be she, for a moment."

Agatha smiled faintly. "You looked as if you had seen a ghost."

Aleck gazed at her again, a long, scrutinizing look. "It *does* make one feel queer, you know."

"It *does* make one feel queer, you know."

[Illustration: "It *does* make one feel queer, you know."]

"But now that you are assured that I'm not a ghost, will you sit down? That chair by the window, please. And I can't tell you how glad I am to see you; for James Hambleton, your cousin, if he is your cousin, is here in this house, and he is ill—very ill indeed."

Aleck's nonchalance had already disappeared, in the series of surprises; but at Agatha's words a flush of pleasure and relief overspread his face. He strode quickly over toward Agatha's couch.

"Oh, I say—old Jim—I thought, I was afraid—"

Agatha was touched by the evidences of his emotion, and her voice became very gentle. "I fancy it is the same—James Hambleton of Lynn?" Aleck nodded and she went on: "That's what he told me, the night we were wrecked."

Agatha looked at Aleck, as if she would discover whether he were trustworthy or not, before giving him more of her story. Presently she continued:

"He's a very brave, a very wonderful man. He jumped overboard to save me, after I fell from the ladder; and then they left us and we swam ashore. But long before we got there I fainted, and he brought me in, all the way, though he was nearly dead of exhaustion himself. He had hemorrhage from overexertion, and afterward a chill. And now there is fever."

Agatha's voice was trembling. Aleck watched her as she told her tale, the flush of happiness and joy still lighting up his face. As she finished relating the meager facts which to her denoted so many heart-throbs, a sob drowned her voice. As Aleck followed the story, his own eyes wavered.

"That's Jim, down to the ground. Good old boy!" he said.

There was silence for a minute, then he heard Agatha's voice, grown little and faint. "If he should die—!"

Aleck, still standing by Agatha's couch, suddenly shook himself. "Where is he? Can I see him now?"

Agatha got up slowly and led the way down the hall, pointing to a door that stood ajar. It was evident that she was weak.

"I can't go in—I can't bear to see him so ill," she whispered; and as Aleck looked at her before entering the sick-room, he saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

Agatha went back to her couch, feeling that the heavens had opened. Here was a friend come to her from she knew not where, whose right it was to assume responsibility for the sick man. He was kind and good, and he loved her rescuer with the boyish devotion of their school-days. He would surely help; he would work with her to keep death away. Whatever love and professional skill could do, should be done; there had been no question as to that, of course, from the beginning. But here was some one who would double, yes, more than double her own efforts; some one who was strong and well and capable. Her heart was thankful.

Before Aleck returned from the sick-room, Doctor Thayer's step sounded on the stairs, followed by the mildly complaining voice of Sallie Kingsbury. Presently the two men were in a low-voiced conference in the hall. Agatha waited while they talked, feeling grateful afresh that Doctor Thayer's grim professional wisdom was to be reinforced by Mr. Van Camp's resources. When the doctor entered Agatha's room, her face had almost the natural flush of health.

"Ah, Miss Agatha Redmond"—the doctor continued frequently to address her by her full name, half in affectionate deference and half with some dry sense of humor peculiar to himself —"Miss Agatha Redmond, so you're beginning to pick up! A good thing, too; for I don't want two patients in one house like the one out yonder. He's a very sick man, Miss Agatha."

"I know, Doctor. I have seen him grow worse, hour by hour, ever since we came. What can be done?"

"He needs special nursing now, and your man in there will be worn out presently."

"Oh, that can be managed. Send to Portland, to Boston, or somewhere. We can get a nurse here soon. Do not spare any trouble. Doctor. I can arrange—"

Doctor Thayer squared himself and paced slowly up and down Agatha's room. He did not reply at once, and when he did, it was with one of his characteristic turns toward an apparently irrelevant topic.

"Have you seen Sister Susan?" he inquired, stopping by the side of Agatha's couch and looking down on her with his shrewd gaze. It was a needless question, for he knew that Agatha had not seen Mrs. Stoddard. She had been too weak and ill to see anybody. Agatha shook her head.

"Well, Miss Agatha Redmond, Susan's the nurse we need for that young gentleman over there. It's constant care he must have now, day and night; and if he gets well, it will be good nursing that does it. There isn't a nurse in this country like Susan, when she once takes hold of a case. That Mr. Hand in there is all right, but he can't sit up much longer night and day, as he has been doing. And he isn't a woman. Don't know why it is, but the Lord seems bent on throwing sick men into women's hands—as if they weren't more than a match for us when we're well!"

Agatha's humorous smile rewarded the doctor's grim comments, if that was what he wanted.

"No, Doctor," she said, with a fleeting touch of her old lightness, "we're never a match for you. We may entertain you or nurse you or feed you, or possibly once in a century or two inspire you; but we're never a match for you."

"For which Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the doctor fervently.

Agatha watched him as he fumbled nervously about the room or clasped his hands behind him under his long coat-tails. The greenish-black frock-coat hung untidily upon him, and his white fringe of hair was anything but smooth. She perceived that something other than medical problems troubled him.

"Would your sister—would Mrs. Stoddard—be willing to come here to take care of Mr. Hambleton?" she ventured.

"Ask me *that*," snapped the doctor, "when no man on earth could tell whether she'll come or not. She says she won't. She's hurt and she's outraged; or at least she thinks she is. But if you could get her to think that it was her duty to take care of that poor boy in there, she'd come fast enough."

Agatha was puzzled. She felt as if there were a dozen ways to turn and only one way that would lead her aright; and she could not find the clue to that one right way. At last she attacked the doctor boldly.

"Tell me, Doctor Thayer," she said earnestly, "just what it is that causes Mrs. Stoddard to feel hurt and outraged. Is it simply because I have inherited the money and the house? She can not possibly know anything about me personally."

The old doctor thrust his under jaw out more belligerently than ever, while turning his answer over in his mind. He took two lengths of the room before stopping again by Agatha's side

and looking down on her.

"She says it isn't the money, but that it's the slight Hercules put upon her for leaving the place, our old home, out of the family. That's one thing; but that isn't the worst. Susan's orthodox, you know, very orthodox; and she has a prejudice against your profession—serving Satan, she calls it. She thinks that's what actresses and opera singers do, though how she knows anything about it, I don't see." The grim smile shone in the doctor's eyes even while he looked, half anxiously, to see how Agatha was taking his explanation of Mrs. Stoddard's attitude. Agatha meditated a moment.

"If it's merely a prejudice in the abstract against my being an opera singer, I think she will overcome that. Besides, Mr. Hambleton is neither an actor nor an opera singer; he isn't 'serving Satan.'"

"Well—" the doctor hesitated, and then went on hastily with a great show of irritation, "Susan's a little set in her views. She disapproves of the way you came here; says you shouldn't have been out in a boat with two men, and that it's a judgment for sin, your being drowned, or next door to it. I'm only saying this, my dear Miss Agatha, to explain to you why Susan—"

But Agatha was enlightened at last, and roused sufficiently to cause two red spots, brighter than they had ever been in health, to burn on her cheeks. She sat up very straight, facing Doctor Thayer's worried gaze, and interrupted him in tones ringing with anger.

"Do you mean to tell me, Doctor Thayer, that your sister, the sister of my mother's lifelong friend, sits in her house and imagines scandalous stories about me, when she knows nothing at all about the facts or about me? That she thinks I was out in a boat alone with two men? That she is mean enough to condemn me without knowing the first thing about this awful accident? Oh, I have no words!" And Agatha covered her burning face with her hands, unable, by mere speech, to express her outraged feelings. Doctor Thayer edged uneasily about Agatha's couch, with a manner resembling that of a whipped dog.

"Why, my dear Miss Agatha, Susan will come round in time. She's not so bad, really. She'll come round in time, only just now we haven't any time to spare. Don't feel so badly; Susan is too set in her views—"

"'Set!'" cried Agatha. "She's a horrid, un-Christian woman!"

"Oh, no," remonstrated the doctor. "Susan's all right, when you once get used to her. She's a trifle old-fashioned in her views—"

But Agatha was not listening to the doctor's feeble justification of Susan. She was thinking hard.

"Doctor Thayer," she urged, "do you want that woman to come here to take care of Mr. Hambleton? Isn't there any one else in this whole countryside who can nurse a sick man? Why, I can do it myself; or Mr. Van Camp, his cousin, could do it. Why should you want her, of all people, when she feels so toward us?"

The moment his professional judgment came into question Doctor Thayer slipped out from the cloud of embarrassment which had engulfed him in his recent conversation, and assumed the authoritative voice that Agatha had first heard.

"My dear Miss Agatha Redmond, that is foolish talk. You are half sick, even now; and it requires a strong person, with no nerves, to do what I desire done. Mr. Van Camp may be his cousin, but the chances are that he wouldn't know a bromide from a blister; and good nurses don't grow on bushes in Ilion, nor in Charlesport, either. There isn't one to be had, so far as I know, and we can't wait to send to Augusta or Portland. The next few days, especially the next twenty-four hours, are critical."

Agatha listened intently, and a growing resolution shone in her eyes.

"Would Mrs. Stoddard come, if it were not for what you said—about me?" she asked.

"The Lord only knows, but I think she would," replied the poor, harassed doctor. "She's always been a regular Dorcas in this neighborhood."

"Dorcas!" cried Agatha, her anger again flaring up. "I should say Sapphira."

"Oh, now, Susan isn't so bad, when you once know her," urged the doctor.

Agatha got up and went to the window, trailing her traveling rug after her. "She shall come—I'll bring her. And sometime she shall mend her words about me—but that can wait. If she will only help to save James Hambleton's life now! Where does she live?" Suddenly, as she stood at the window, she saw her opportunity. "There's Little Simon down there now under the trees; and his buggy must be somewhere near. Will you stay here, Doctor Thayer, with Mr. Hambleton, while I go to see your sister?"

"Hadn't I better drive you over to see Susan myself?" feebly suggested the doctor.

"No, I'll go alone." There was anger, determination, gunpowder in Agatha's voice.

"But mind you, don't offer her any money," the doctor warned, as he watched her go down the hall and disappear for an instant in the bedroom where James Hambleton lay. She came out almost immediately and without a word descended the wide stairway, opened the dining-room door, and called softly to Sallie Kingsbury.

Doctor Thayer returned to the sick-room. Ten minutes later he heard the wheels of Little Simon's buggy rolling rapidly up the road in the direction of Susan Stoddard's place.

CHAPTER XIV

SUSAN STODDARD'S PRAYER

There was a wide porch, spotlessly scrubbed, along the front of the house, and two hydrangeas blooming gorgeously in tubs, one on either side of the walk. The house looked new and modern, shiny with paint and furnished with all the conveniences offered by the relentless progress of our day.

Little Simon had informed Agatha, during their short drive, that Deacon Stoddard had achieved this "residence" shortly before his death; and his tone implied that it was the pride of the town, its real treasure. Even to Agatha's absorbed and preoccupied mind it presented a striking contrast to the old red house, which had received her so graciously into its spacious comfort. She marveled that anything so fresh and modish as the house before her could have come into being in the old town. It was next to a certainty that there was a model laundry with set tubs beyond the kitchen, and equally sure that no old horsehair lounge subtly invited the wearied traveler to rest.

A cool draft came through the screen door. Within, it was cleaner than anything Agatha had ever seen. The stair-rail glistened, the polished floors shone. A neat bouquet of sweet peas stood exactly in the center of a snow-white doily, which was exactly in the middle of a shiny, round table. The very door-mat was brand new; Agatha would never have thought of wiping her shoes on it.

Agatha's ring was answered by a half-grown girl, who looked scared when she saw a stranger at the door. Agatha walked into the parlor, in spite of the girl's hesitation In inviting her, and directed her to say to Mrs. Stoddard that Miss Redmond, from the old red house, wished particularly to see her. The girl's face assumed an expression of intelligent and ecstatic curiosity.

"Oh!" she breathed. Then, "She's putting up plums, but she can come out in a few minutes." She could not go without lingering to look at Agatha, her wide-eyed gaze taking note of her hair, her dress, her hands, her face. As Agatha became conscious of the ingenuous inspection to which she was subjected, she smiled at the girl—one of her old, radiant, friendly smiles.

"Run now, and tell Mrs. Stoddard, there's a good child! And sometime you must come to see me at the red house; will you?"

The girl's face lighted up as if the sun had come through a cloud. She smiled at Agatha in return, with a "Yes" under her breath. Thus are slaves made.

Left alone in the cool, dim parlor, so orderly and spotless, Agatha had a presentiment of the prejudice of class and of religion against which she was about to throw herself. Susan Stoddard's fanaticism was not merely that of an individual; it represented the stored-up strength of hardy, conscience-driven generations. The Stoddards might build themselves houses with model laundries, but they did not thereby transfer their real treasure from the incorruptible kingdom. If they were not ruled by aesthetic ideals, neither were they governed by thoughts of worldly display. This fragrant, clean room bespoke character and family history. Agatha found herself absently looking down at a white wax cross, entwined with wax flowers, standing under a glass on the center-table. It was a strange piece of handicraft. Its whiteness was suggestive of death, not life, and the curving leaves and petals, through which the vital sap once flowed, were beautiful no longer, now that their day of tender freshness was so inappropriately prolonged. As Agatha, with mind aloof, wondered vaguely at the laborious patience exhibited in the work, her eye caught sight of an inscription molded in the wax pedestal: "Brother." Her mind was sharply brought back from the impersonal region of speculation. What she saw was not merely a sentimental, misguided attempt at art; it was Susan Stoddard's memorial of her brother, Hercules Thayer—the man who had so unexpectedly influenced Agatha's own life. To Susan Stoddard this wax cross was the symbol of the companionship of childhood, and of all the sweet and bitter involved in the inexplicable bond of blood relationship. Agatha felt more kindly toward her because of this mute, fantastic memorial. She looked up almost with her characteristic friendly smile as she heard slow, steady steps coming down the hall.

The eyes that returned Agatha's look were not smiling, though they did not look unkind. They gazed, without embarrassment, as without pride, into Agatha's face, as if they would probe at once to the covered springs of action. Mrs. Stoddard was a thick-set woman, rather short, looking toward sixty, with iron-gray hair parted in the middle and drawn back in an old-fashioned, pretty way.

It was to the credit of Mrs. Stoddard's breeding that she took no notice of Agatha's peculiar dress, unsuited as it was to any place but the bedroom, even in the morning. Mrs. Stoddard herself was neat as a pin in a cotton gown made for utility, not beauty. She stood for an instant with her clear, untroubled gaze full upon Agatha, then drew forward a chair from its mathematical position against the wall. When she spoke, her voice was a surprise, it was so low and deep, with a resonance like that of the 'cello. It was not the voice of a young woman; it was, rather, a rare gift of age, telling how beautiful an old woman's speech could be. Moreover, it carried refinement of birth and culture, a beauty of phrase and enunciation, which would have marked her with distinction anywhere.

"How do you do, Miss Redmond?"

Agatha, standing by the table with the cross, made no movement toward the chair. She was not come face to face with Mrs. Stoddard for the purpose of social visitation, but because, in the warfare of life, she had been sent to the enemy with a message. That, at least, was Agatha's point of view. Officially, she was come to plead with Mrs. Stoddard; personally, she was hot and resentful at her unjust words. Her reply to her hostess' greeting was brief and her attitude unbending.

"I have come to ask you, Mrs. Stoddard," Agatha began, though to her chagrin, she found her voice was unsteady—"I have come personally to ask you, Mrs. Stoddard, if you will help us in caring for our friend, who is very ill. Your brother, Doctor Thayer, wishes it. It is a case of life and death, maybe; and skilful nursing is difficult to find."

Agatha's hand, that rested on the table, was trembling by the time she finished her speech; she was vividly conscious of the panic that had come upon her nerves at a fresh realization of the wall of defense and resistance which she was attempting to assail. It spoke to her from Mrs. Stoddard's calm, other-worldly eyes, from her serene, deep voice.

"No, Miss Redmond, that work is not for me."

"But please, Mrs. Stoddard, will you not reconsider your decision? It is not for myself I ask, but for another—one who is suffering."

Mrs. Stoddard's gaze went past Agatha and rested on the white cross with the inscription, "Brother." She slowly shook her head, saying again, "No, that work is not for me. The Lord does not call me there."

As the two women stood there, with the funeral cross between them, each with her heart's burden of griefs, convictions and resentments, each recoiled, sensitively, from the other's touch. But life and the burden life imposes were too strong.

"How can yon say, Mrs. Stoddard, 'that work is not for me,' when there is suffering you can relieve, sickness that you can cure? I am asking a hard thing, I know; but we will help to make it as easy as possible for you, and we are in great need."

"Should the servants of the Lord falter in doing His work?" Mrs. Stoddard's voice intoned reverently, while she looked at Agatha with her sincere eyes. "No. He gives strength to perform His commands. But sickness and sorrow and death are on every hand; to some it is appointed for a moment's trial, to others it is the wages of sin. We can not alter the Lord's decrees."

Agatha stared at the rapt speaker with amazed eyes, and presently the anger she had felt at Doctor Thayer's words rose again within her breast, doubly strong. The doctor had given but a feeble version of the judgment; here was the real voice hurling anathema, as did the prophets of old. But even as she listened, she gathered all her force to combat this sword of the spirit which had so suddenly risen against her.

"You are a hard and unjust woman, to talk of the 'wages of sin.' What do you know of my life, or of him who is sick over at the red house? Who are you, to sit in judgment upon us?"

"I am the humblest of His servants," replied Susan Stoddard, and there was no shadow of hypocrisy in her tones. She went on, almost sorrowfully: "But we are sent to serve and obey. 'Keep ye separate and apart from the children of this world,' is His commandment, and I have no choice but to obey. Besides," and she looked up fearlessly into Agatha's face, "we *do* know about you. It is spoken of by all how you follow a wicked and worldly profession. You can't touch pitch and not be defiled. The temple must be purged and emptied of worldliness before Christ can come in."

Agatha was baffled by the very simplicity and directness of Mrs. Stoddard's words, even though she felt that her own texts might easily be turned against her. But she had no heart for argument, even if it would lead her to verbal triumph over her companion. Instinctively she felt

that not thus was Mrs. Stoddard to be won.

"Whatever you may think about me or about my profession, Mrs. Stoddard," she said, "you must believe me when I say that Mr. Hambleton is free from your censure, and worthy of your sincerest praise. He is not an opera singer—of that I am convinced—"

Susan Stoddard here interpolated a stern "Don't you know?"

"Listen, Mrs. Stoddard!" cried Agatha in desperation. "When the yacht, the *Jeanne D'Arc*, began to sink, there was panic and fear everywhere. While I was climbing down into one of the smaller boats, the rope broke, and I fell into the water. I should have drowned, then and there, if it had not been for this man; for all the rest of the ship's load jumped into the boats and rowed away to save themselves. He helped me to come ashore, after I had become exhausted by swimming. He is ill and near to death, because he risked his life to save mine. Is not that a heaven-inspired act?"

Mrs. Stoddard's eyes glistened at Agatha's tale, which had at last got behind the older woman's armor. But her next attack took a form that Agatha had not foreseen. In her reverent voice, so suited to exhortation, she demanded:

"And what will you do with your life, now that you have been saved by the hand of God? Will you dedicate it to Him, whose child you are?"

Agatha, chafing in her heart, paused a moment before she answered:

"My life has not been without its tests of faith and of conscience, Mrs. Stoddard; and who of us does not wish, with the deepest yearning, to know the right and to do it?"

"Knowledge comes from the Lord," came Mrs. Stoddard's words, like an antiphonal response in the litany.

"My way has been different from yours; and It is a way that would be difficult for you to understand, possibly. But you shall not condemn me without reason."

"Are you going to marry that man you have been living with these many days?" was the next stern inquiry.

A stinging blush—a blush of anger and outraged pride as much as of modesty—surged up over Agatha's face. She was silent a moment, and in that moment learned what it was to control anger.

"I have not been 'living with' this man, in any sense of the term, Mrs. Stoddard. I will say this once for all to you, though I never would, in any other conceivable situation, reply to such a question and such an implication. You have no right to say or think such things."

"Wickedness must be rebuked of the Lord," intoned Mrs. Stoddard.

"Are you His mouthpiece?" said Agatha scornfully. But she was rebuked for her scorn by Mrs. Stoddard's look. Her eyes rested on Agatha's face with pleading and patience, as if she were a world-mother, agonizing for the salvation of her children.

"It is His command to pluck the brand from the burning," said Susan Stoddard. "Ungodly example is a sin, and earthly love often a snare for youthful feet."

As Agatha listened to Mrs. Stoddard's strange plea, the instinct within her which, from the first moment of the interview, had recoiled from this fanatical but intensely spiritual woman, found its way, as it were, into the light. Such was the power of her sincerity, that, in spite of the extraordinary character of the interview, Agatha's heart throbbed with a new comprehension which was almost love. She stepped closer to Susan Stoddard, her tall figure overtopping the other's sturdy one, and took one of her strong, work-hardened hands.

"Mrs. Stoddard, this man has never spoken a word of love to me. But if I ever marry, it will be a man like him—a plain, high-hearted gentleman. There! You have a woman's secret. And now come with me, and help us to save a life. You can not, you must not, refuse me now."

The subtle changes of the mind are hard to trace and are often obscure even to the eye of science; but every day those changes make or mar our joy. Susan Stoddard looked for a long minute up into the vivid face bending over hers, while her spirit, even as Agatha's had done, pierced the hedge which separated them, and comprehended something of the goodness in the other's soul. Finally she laid her other hand over Agatha's, enclosing it in a strong clasp. Then, with a certain pathetic pride in her submission, she said:

"I have been wrong, Agatha; I will come." Agatha's grateful eyes dwelt on hers, but the strain of the interview was beginning to count. She sank down in the chair that Mrs. Stoddard had offered at the beginning of their meeting, and covered her eyes with one hand. The elder woman kept the other.

"We will not go to our task alone," she said, "we will ask God's help. The prayer of faith shall

heal the sick." Then falling to her knees by Agatha's side, with rapt, lifted face and closed eyes, she made her confession and her petition to the Lord. Her ringing voice intoned the phrases of the Bible as if they had been music and bore the burden of her deepest soul. She said she had been sinful in imputing unrighteousness to others, and that she had been blinded by her own wilfulness. She prayed for the stranger within her gates, for the sick man over yonder, and implored God's blessing on the work of her hands; and praise should be to the Lord. Amen.

"And now, Angie," she said practically, as she rose to her feet, addressing the girl who instantly appeared from around the doorway, "go and tell Little Simon to drive up to the horse-block. Agatha, you go home and rest, and I'll get hitched up and be over there almost as soon as you are. Angie will help me get the ice-bag and all the other things, in case you might not have them handy. Come, Agatha!"

But they paused yet a moment, stopping as if by a common instinct to look at the white cross. Susan Stoddard gazed down on it with a grief in her eyes that was the more heartbreaking because it was inarticulate. Agatha remembered the doctor's words, and understood something of the friction that could exist between this evangelistic sister and the finer, more intellectual brother.

"I've never been inside the old red house since he died," said Mrs. Stoddard.

"I'm sorry!" cried Agatha. "It is hard for you to come there, I know."

"He maketh the rough places plain," chanted Susan Stoddard. "Hercules was a good brother and a good man!"

Agatha laid her arm about the older woman's shoulder, and thus was led out to Little Simon's buggy. Susan helped her in, and Agatha leaned back, with closed eyes, indifferent to the beauty of early afternoon on a cool summer's day. Little Simon let her ride in quiet, but landed her in the dust on the opposite side of the road from the lilac bushes.

"Those trees!" said Doctor Thayer's voice, as he came out to meet her. "How did you make out with Susan?"

"She's coming," said Agatha. "Is your patient any better?"

"I don't think he's any worse," answered the doctor dubiously, "but I'm glad Susan's coming. I'd be glad to know how you got round her."

Agatha paused a moment before replying, "I wrestled with her."

The doctor smiled grimly, "I've known the wrestling to come out the other way."

"I can believe that!" said Agatha.

"Well, it's fairly to your credit!" And perhaps this was as near praise as his New England speech ever came.

CHAPTER XV

ECHOES FROM THE CITY

Sallie Kingsbury, unused to psychological analysis, could not have explained why Mr. Hand was so objectionable to her. He was no relative of the family, she had discovered that; and, accustomed as she was to the old-fashioned gentility of a thrifty New England town, instinct told her that he could not possibly be one of its varied products. He might have come from anywhere; he talked so little that he was suspicious on that ground alone; and when he did speak, there was no accent at all that Sallie could lay hold of. Useful as he was just now in taking care of that poor young man up-stairs, he nevertheless inspired in her breast a most unholy irritation. Her attitude was that of a housemaid pursuing the cat with the broom.

Mr. Hand was not greatly troubled by Sallie's tendency to sweep him out of the way, but whenever he took any notice of her he was more than a match for her. On the afternoon following Agatha's visit to Mrs. Stoddard, he appeared to show some slight objection to being treated like the cat. He ate his luncheon in the kitchen—a large, delightful room—while Aleck Van Camp stayed with James. Hand was stirring broth over the stove, now and then giving a sharp eye to Sallie's preparation of her new mistress' luncheon.

"You haven't put any salt or pepper on mademoiselle's tray, Sallie," said he, as the maid was about to start up-stairs.

"*Miss* Sallie, I should prefer, Mr. Hand," she requested in a mournful tone of resignation. "And Miss Redmond don't take any pepper on her aigs; I watched her yesterday."

"Well, she may want some to-day, just the same," insisted Mr. Hand in a lordly manner, putting a thin silver boat, filled with salt, and a cheap pink glass pepper-shaker side by side on the tray. Sallie brushed Hand away in disgust.

"That doesn't go with the best silver salt-cellar; that's the kitchen pepper. And, you can say *Miss* Sallie, if you please."

"No, just Sallie, if *you* please! I've taken a great fancy to you, Sallie, and I don't like to be so formal," argued Hand. "Besides, I like your name; and I'll carry the tray to the top of the stairs for you, if you'll be good."

"I wouldn't trouble you for the world, Mr. Hand," she tossed back. "You'd stumble and break Parson Thayer's best china that I've washed for seventeen years and only broke the handle of one cup. She wouldn't drink her coffee this morning outer the second-best cups; went to the buttery before breakfast and picked out wunner the best set, and poured herself a cup. She said it was inspiring, but I call it wasteful—and me with extra work all day!"

Sallie disappeared, leaving a dribbling trail of good-natured complaint behind her. Mr. Hand continued making broth—at which he was as expert as he was at the lever or the launch engine. He strained and seasoned, and regarded two floating islands of oily substance with disapproval. While he was working Sallie joined him again at the stove, her important and injured manner all to the front.

"Says she'll take another aig," she explained. "Only took one yesterday, and then I had two all cooked."

"What did I tell you?" jeered Hand.

"You didn't tell me anything about aigs, not that I recollect," Sallie replied tartly.

"Well, the principle's the same," asserted Hand. After a moment his countenance assumed a crafty and jocose expression, which would have put even Sallie on her guard if she had looked up in time to see it. "You won't have so much extra work when mademoiselle's maid arrives," he said slyly. "*She'll* wait on mademoiselle and attend to her tray when she wants one, and you won't have to do anything for mademoiselle at all."

Sallie became slowly transfixed in a spread-eagle attitude, with the half of a thin white egg-shell held up in each hand.

"A maid! When's she coming?"

"Ought to be here now, she's had time enough. But women never can get round without wasting a lot of time." Sallie's glance must have brought him to his senses, for he added hastily, "City women, I mean."

"Hm! She won't touch Parson Thayer's china—not if I know myself!" Sallie disappeared with Miss Redmond's second egg. When she returned, she delivered a message to the effect that Miss Redmond wished to see Mr. Hand when he had finished his luncheon. He was off instantly, calling, "Watch that broth, Sallie!"

It was a different Hand, however, who entered Miss Redmond's room a moment later. His half impudent manner changed to distant respect, tinged with a sort of personal adoration. Agatha felt it, though it was too intangible to be taken notice of, either for rebuke or reward. Agatha was sitting in a rocking-chair by the window, sipping her tea out of the best tea-cup, her tray on a stand in front of her. She looked excited and flushed, but her eyes were tired.

"Can I do anything for you, Mademoiselle?" Hand inquired courteously.

"Yes, please," answered Agatha, and paused a moment, as if to recall her thoughts in order. Hand was very presentable, in negligée shirt which Sallie must have washed while he was asleep. He was one of those people who look best in their working or sporting clothes, ruddy, clean and strong. He would have dwindled absolutely into the commonplace in Sunday clothes, if he was ever so rash as to have any.

"I wish to talk with you a little," said Agatha. "We haven't had much opportunity of talking, so far; and perhaps it is time that we understand each other a little better."

"As mademoiselle wishes," conceded Hand.

"In the first place," Agatha went on, "I must tell you that Mrs. Stoddard is coming to help nurse Mr. Hambleton. You have been very good to stay with us so long; and if you will stay on, I shall be glad. But Doctor Thayer thinks you should have help, and so do I. Especially for the next few days."

"That is entirely agreeable to me, Mademoiselle."

"Will you tell me what—what remuneration you were receiving as chauffeur?"

"Pardon me, but that is unnecessary, Mademoiselle. If you will allow me to stay here, either taking care of Mr. Hambleton or in any outdoor work, for a week or as long as you may need me, I shall consider myself repaid."

Agatha was silent while she buttered a last bit of toast. Hand's reticence and evident secretiveness were baffling. She had no intention of letting the point of wages go by in the way Hand indicated, but after deliberation she dropped it for the moment, in order to take up another matter.

"I was wondering," she began again, "how you happened to escape from the *Jeanne D'Arc* alone in a rowboat, and what your connection with Monsieur Chatelard was. Will you tell me?"

A perfectly vacant look came into Hand's face. He might have been deaf and dumb.

At last Agatha began again. "I am grateful, exceedingly grateful, Mr. Hand, for all that you have done for us since this catastrophe, but I can't have any mystery about people. That is absurd. Did you leave the *Jeanne D'Arc* when the others did—when I fell into the water?"

This time Hand consented to answer. "No, Mademoiselle; I did not know you had fallen into the water until I brought you ashore in the morning."

"Then how did you get off?"

"Well, it was rather queer. The men were all tired out working at the pumps, and Monsieur Chatelard ordered a seaman named Bazinet and me to relieve two of them. He said he would call us when the boats were lowered, as the yacht was then getting pretty shaky. Bazinet and I worked a long time; and when finally we got on deck, thinking the *Jeanne D'Arc* was nearly done for, the boats had put off. We heard some one shouting, and Bazinet got frightened and jumped for the boat. He thought they'd wait for him. It was too dark for me to see whether he made it or not. I stayed on the yacht for some time, not knowing anything better to do—" Hand allowed himself a faint smile—"and at last, after a hunt, I found that extra boat, stowed away aft. It was very small, and it leaked; probably that was why they did not think of using it. But it was better than nothing. I found some putty and a tin bucket, and got food and a lot of other things, though the boat filled so fast that I had to throw most everything out. But I got ashore, as you know. I didn't even wait to see the last of the *Jeanne D'Arc*."

Agatha's eyes shone. Hand's story was perfectly simple and plausible. But the other question was even more important. She hesitated before repeating it, however, and rewarded Hand's unusual frankness with a grateful look.

"That was a night of experience for us all," she said, with a little sigh at the memory of it.

"But tell me—" Agatha looked up squarely at Hand, only to encounter his deaf and dumb expression.

"If you will excuse me, Mademoiselle," said Hand deferentially, "I think Mr. Hambleton's broth is burning."

"Ah, well, very well!" said Agatha. And in spite of herself she smiled.

Hand found Mrs. Stoddard installed in James Hambleton's room. Doctor Thayer and Aleck had gone, both leaving word that they would return before night. Mrs. Stoddard had smoothed James's bed, folded down the sheet with exactness, noted her brother's directions for treatment, and sat reading her Bible by the window. Mr. Hand stood for a moment, silently regarding first the patient, then his nurse.

"By the grace of God, he will pull through, I firmly believe!" ejaculated Mrs. Stoddard.

As the first words came in that resonant deep voice, Hand thought that the new nurse was swearing, though presently he changed his mind.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied with unwonted meekness. Then, "I'll sleep an hour or two, if that is agreeable to you, ma'am."

"Perfectly!" heartily responded Mrs. Stoddard, and Mr. Hand disappeared like the mist before the sun.

It was to be an afternoon of excitement, after all, though Agatha thought that she would apply herself to the straightening out of much necessary business. But after an hour's work over letters at Parson Thayer's desk, there occurred an ebullition below which could be nothing less than the arrival of Lizzie, Agatha's maid, with sundry articles of luggage. She was a small-minded but efficient city girl, clever enough to keep her job by making herself useful, and sophisticated to the point of indecency. No woman ought ever to have known so much as Lizzie knew. Agatha was to hear how she had been relieved by the telegram several days before, how she had nearly killed herself packing in such haste, how she thought she was traveling to the ends of the earth, coming thus to a region she had never heard of before.

Big Simon, who had been instructed to watch for Lizzie and bring her and her baggage out, presently arrived with the trunks, having sent the maid on ahead in the buggy with his son. Big Simon positively declined to carry the two trunks to the second floor, saying he thought they'd like it just as well, or better, if he left them in the hall down-stairs. Lizzie was angrily hesitating whether to argue with him or use the persuasion of one of her mistress' silver coins, when Agatha interfered, and saved her from making the mistake of her life. It is doubtful if she could have lived in Ilion after having been guilty of tipping one of its foremost citizens. And even if she had, she would not have got the trunks taken up-stairs.

The prospect of discarding Sallie Kingsbury's makeshifts and wearing a dress which belonged to her had more comfort in it than Agatha had ever believed possible; and the reality was even better. She made a toilet, for the first time in many days, with her accustomed accessories, dressed herself in a white wool gown, and felt better.

"Are these the relatives you were visiting, Miss Redmond?" inquired Lizzie, eaten up with curiosity, which was her mortal weakness.

Agatha paused, struck with the form of the maid's question; but, knowing her liking for items of news, she answered cautiously:

"Not relatives exactly. The Thayers were old friends of my mother."

Lizzie shook out a skirt and hung it in the wardrobe in the far corner of the room. She was bursting to know everything about Miss Redmond's sudden journey, but knew better than to appear anxious.

"The message at the hotel was so indefinite that I didn't know at all what I should do. After the excitement quieted down a little, I went out to visit my cousin Hattie, in the Bronx."

"What sort of excitement?"

"Oh, newspaper men, and the manager, and Herr Weimar, of the orchestra, and a lot of other people who came, wanting to see you immediately. They seemed to think I was hiding you somewhere."

Agatha smiled. She could imagine Lizzie in her new-fledged importance, talking to all those people.

"You spoke of a message—" ventured Agatha.

"Yes; the one you sent the day you left, Miss Redmond. The hotel clerk said you had suddenly left town on a visit to a sick relative."

"Oh, yes."

Lizzie's quick scent was already on the trail of a mystery, but Agatha was in no mood just then to give her any version of the events of that Monday afternoon.

"Was there any other message, Miss Redmond? Some word for me, which the clerk forgot to deliver?"

"No, nothing else."

"Mr. Straker came Tuesday morning with some contracts for you to sign. He said that you had an appointment with him, and he was nearly crazy when he found you had gone away without leaving your address."

Agatha smiled more and more broadly, to Lizzie's disgust, but she could not help it. "I don't doubt he was disturbed. Did he come again?"

"Come again, Miss Redmond!" Lizzie hung a blue silk coat over its hanger, held it carefully up to the light, and turned toward her mistress with the mien of a person who isn't to be bamboozled. "He came twice every day to see if I had any word from you; and when I went to Cousin Hattie's he called me up on the 'phone every morning and evening. Most unreasonable, Mr. Straker was. He said there wasn't a singer in town he could get to fill your engagements, and he was losing a hundred dollars a day. He's very much put out, Miss Redmond."

"Well, I was, too," said Agatha, but somehow her tone failed to satisfy the maid. To Agatha the thought of the dictatorial manager fluttering about New York in quest of a vanished singer—well, the picture had its humorous side. It had its serious side, too, for Agatha, of course, but for the moment she put off thinking about that. Lizzie, however, had borne the brunt of Mr. Straker's vexation, and, in that lumber-box she called her mind, she regarded the matter solely as her personal cue to come more prominently upon the stage.

"Then your accompanist came every morning, as you had directed, Miss Redmond; and Madame Florio sent word a dozen times about those new gowns." Lizzie, with the memory of her sudden importance, almost took up the role of baffled innocence. "I declare, Miss Redmond, I didn't know what to do or say to those people. The whole thing seemed so irregular, with you not

leaving any word of explanation with me."

"That is true, Lizzie; it was irregular, and certainly very inconvenient. And it is serious enough, so far as breaking my engagements is concerned. But the circumstances were very unusual and—pressing. Some one else gave the message at the hotel, and, as you know, I had no time even to get a satchel."

"That's what I said when the reporters came—that you were so worried over your sick relative that you did not wait for anything."

Agatha groaned. "Did—did the papers have much to say about my leaving town?"

"They had columns, Miss Redmond, and some of them had your picture on the front page with an announcement of your elopement. But Mr. Straker contradicted that; he told them he had heard from you, and that you were at the bedside of a dying relative. Besides that, Miss Redmond, the difficulty in getting up an elopement story was the lack of a probable man. Your manager and your accompanist were both found and interviewed, and there wasn't anybody else in New York except me who knew you. Your discretion, Miss Redmond, has always been remarkable."

Agatha was suddenly tired of Lizzie.

"Very well, Lizzie, that will do. You may go and get your own things unpacked. We shan't return to New York for several days yet."

"You've heard from Mr. Straker, of course, Miss Redmond?"

"No, but I have written to him, explaining everything. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; only when I sent him word that I had heard from you, he said at first that he was coming here with me. Some business prevented him, but he must have telegraphed."

"Maybe he has; but it takes some time, evidently, for a hidden person to be discovered in Ilion."

As soon as the words were off her lips, Agatha realized that she had made a slip. One has to look sharp when talking to a sophisticated maid.

"But were you hiding, Miss Redmond?" Lizzie artlessly inquired.

"Oh, no, Lizzie; don't be silly. The telegram probably went wrong; telegrams often do."

"Not when Mr. Straker sends them," proffered Lizzie. "But if his telegrams have gone wrong, you may count on his coming down here himself. He is much worried over the rehearsals, which begin early in the month, he said. And he got the full directions you sent me for coming here; he would have them."

Agatha knew her manager's pertinacity when once on the track of an object. Moreover, the humor of the situation passed from her mind, leaving only a vivid impression of the trouble and worry which were sure to follow such a serious breaking up of well established plans. She was rarely capricious, even under vexation, but she yielded to a caprice at this moment, and one, moreover, that was very unjust toward her much-tried manager. The thought of that man bursting in upon her in the home that had been the fastidious Hercules Thayer's, in the midst of her anxiety and sorrow over James Hambleton, was intolerable.

"If Mr. Straker should by any chance follow me here, you must tell him that I can not see him," she said, and departed, leaving Lizzie wrapped in righteous indignation.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, after her mistress had disappeared. "Can't see him, after coming all this way! And into a country like this, too, where there's only one bath-tub, and you fill that from a pump in the yard!"

CHAPTER XVI

A FIGHTING CHANCE

The dining-room of the old red house was cool, and fragrant from the blossoming heliotrope bed below its window. The twilight, which is long in eastern Maine, shed a soft glow over the old mahogany and silver, and an equally soft and becoming radiance over the two women seated at the table. After a sonorous blessing, uttered by Mrs. Stoddard in tones full of unction, she and Agatha ate supper in a sympathetic silence. It was a meal upon which Sallie Kingsbury expended

her best powers as cook, with no mean results; but nobody took much notice of it, after all. Mrs. Stoddard poured her tea into her saucer, drinking and eating absent-mindedly. Her face lighted with something very like a smile whenever she caught Agatha's eyes, but to her talk was not necessary. Sallie hovered around the door, even though Lizzie had condescended to put on a white apron and serve. But Agatha sent the city maid away, bidding her wait on the people in the sick-room instead.

Mr. Hand had been left with the patient and had acquiesced in the plan to stay on duty until midnight, when Mrs. Stoddard was to be called. Agatha had spent an hour with James, helping Mrs. Stoddard, or watching the patient while the nurse made many necessary trips to the kitchen. The sight of James's woeful plight drove every thought from her mind. Engagements and managers lost their reality, and became shadow memories beside the vividness of his desperate need. He had no knowledge of her, or of any efforts to secure his comfort. He talked incessantly, sometimes in a soft, unintelligible murmur, sometimes in loud and emphatic tones. His eyes were brilliant but wandering, his movements were abrupt or violent, heedless or feeble, as the moment decreed. He talked about the dingy, nasty fo'cas'le, the absurdity of his not being able to get around, the fine outfit of the *Sea Gull*, the chill of the water. He sometimes swore softly, almost apologetically, and he uttered most unchristian sentiments toward some person whom he described as wearing extremely neat and dandified clothes.

After the first five minutes Agatha paid no heed to his words, and could bear to stay in the room only when she was able to do something to soothe or comfort him. She was not wholly unfamiliar with illness and the trouble that comes in its train, but the sight of James, with his unrecognizing eyes and his wits astray, a superb engine gone wild, brought a sharp and hitherto unknown pain to her throat. She stood over his bed, holding his hands when he would reach frenziedly into the air after some object of his feverish desire; she coaxed him back to his pillow when he fancied he must run to catch something that was escaping him. It took nerve and strength to care for him; unceasing vigilance and ingenuity were required in circumventing his erratic movements.

And through it all there was something about his clean, honest mind and person that stirred only affectionate pity. He was a child, taking a child's liberties. Mrs. Stoddard brooded over him already, as a mother over her dearest son; Mr. Hand had turned gentle as a woman and gave the service of love, not of the eye. His skill in managing almost rivaled Mrs. Stoddard's. James accepted Hand's ministrations as a matter of course, became more docile under his treatment, and watched for him when he disappeared. Indeed, the whole household was taxed for James; and Agatha, deeply distressed as she was, throbbed with gratitude that she could help care for him, if only for an hour.

Thus it was that the two women, eating their supper and looking out over Hercules Thayer's pleasant garden, were silent. Mrs. Stoddard was thinking about the duties of the night, Agatha was swallowed up in the miseries of the last hour. Mrs. Stoddard was the first to rise. She was tipping off on her fingers a number of items which Agatha did not catch, saying "Hm!" and "Yes!" to herself. Despite her deep anxiety, Mrs. Stoddard was in her element. She had nothing less than genius in nursing. She was cheerful, quick in emergencies, steady under the excitements of the sick-room, and faithful in small, as well as large, matters. Moreover, she excelled most doctors in her ability to interpret changes and symptoms, and in her ingenuity in dealing with them. Her two days with James had given her an understanding of the case, and she was ready with new devices for his relief.

Agatha finished her tea and joined Mrs. Stoddard as she stood looking out into the twilight, seeing things not visible to the outward eye.

"Yes, that's it," she ended abruptly, thinking aloud; then including Agatha without any change of tone, she went on: "I think we'd better change our plans a little. I'm going up-stairs now to stay while your Mr. Hand goes over to the house for me. There are several things I want from home."

Agatha had no conception of having an opinion that was contrary to Mrs. Stoddard's, so completely was she won by her tower-like strength.

"You know, Mrs. Stoddard," she said earnestly, "that I want to be told at once, if—if there is any change."

"I know, child," the older woman replied, with a faraway look. "We are in the Lord's hands. He taketh the young in their might, and He healeth them that are nigh unto death. We can only wait His will."

Agatha was the product of a different age and a different system of thought. But she was still young, and the pressure of the hour revived in her some ghost of her Puritan ancestral faith, longing to become a reality in her heart again, if only for this dire emergency. She turned, eager but painfully embarrassed, to Mrs. Stoddard, detaining her by a touch on her arm.

"But you said, Mrs. Stoddard," she implored, "that the prayer of faith shall heal the sick. And I have been praying, too; I have tried to summon my faith. Do you believe that it counts—for good?"

Mrs. Stoddard's rapt gaze blessed Agatha. Her faith and courage were of the type that rise according to need. She drew nearer to her sanctuary, to the fountain of her faith, as her earthly peril waxed. Her voice rang with confidence as she almost chanted: "No striving toward God is ever lost, dear child. He is with us in our sorrow, even as in our joy." Her strong hand closed over Agatha's for a moment, and then her steady, slow steps sounded on the stairs.

Agatha went into the parlor, whose windows opened upon the piazza, and from there wandered down the low steps to the lawn. It was growing dusk, a still, comfortable evening. Over the lawn lay the indescribable freshness of a region surrounded by many trees and acres of grass. Presently the old hound, Danny, came slowly from his kennel in the back yard, and paced the grass beside Agatha, looking up often with melancholy eyes into her face. Here was a living relic of her mother's dead friend, carrying in his countenance his sorrow for his departed master. Agatha longed to comfort him a little, convey to him the thought that she would love him and try to understand his nature, now that his rightful master was gone. She talked softly to him, calling him to her but not touching him. Back and forth they paced, the old dog following closer and closer to Agatha's heels.

Back of the house was a path leading diagonally across to the wall which separated Parson Thayer's place from the meeting-house. The dog seemed intent on following this path. Agatha humored him, climbed the low stile and entered the churchyard. As the hound leaped the stile after her, he wagged his tail and appeared almost happy. Agatha remembered that Sallie had told her, on the day of her arrival, of the dog, and how he was accustomed to walk every evening with his master. Doubtless they sometimes walked here, among the silent company assembled in the churchyard; and the minister's silent friend was now having the peculiar satisfaction of doing again what he had once done with his master. Thus the little acre of the dead had its claim on life, and its happiness for throbbing hearts.

Agatha called the old dog to her again. This time he came near, rubbed hard against her dress, and, when she sat down on a flat tombstone, laid his head comfortably in her lap, wagging his tail in satisfaction.

Danny was a companion who did not obstruct thought, but encouraged it; and as Agatha sat resting on the stone with Danny close by, in that quiet yard full of the noiseless ghosts of the past, her thoughts went back to James. His unnatural eyes and restless spirit haunted her. She thought of that other night on the water, full of heartbreaking struggle as it was, as a happy night compared to the one which was yet to come. She recalled their foolish talk while they were on the beach, and smiled sadly over it. Her courage was at the ebb. She felt that the buoyancy of spirit that had sustained them both during the night of struggle could never revisit the wasted and disorganized body lying in Parson Thayer's house—her house. A certain practical sense that was strong in her rose and questioned whether she had done everything that could be done for his welfare. She thought so. Had she not even prayed, with all her concentration of mind and will? She heard again Susan Stoddard's deep voice: "No striving toward God is ever lost!" In spite of her unfaith, a sense of rest in a power larger than herself came upon her unawares. Danny, who had wandered away, came back and sat down heavily on the edge of her skirt, close to her. "Good Danny!" she praised, petting him to his heart's content.

It was thus that Aleck Van Camp found them, as he came over the stile from the house. His tones were slower and more precise than ever, but his face was drawn and marked with anxiety. He had a careful thought for Agatha, even in the face of his greater trouble.

"You have chosen a bad hour to wander about, Miss Redmond. The evening dews are heavy."

"Yes, I know; Danny and I were just going home. Have you been into the house?"

"Yes, I left Doctor Thayer there in consultation with the other physician that came to-day. They sent me off. Old Jim—well, you know as well as I do. With your permission, I'm going to stay the night. I'll bunk in the hall, or anywhere. Don't think of a bed for me; I don't want one."

"I'm glad you'll stay. It seems, somehow, as if every one helps; that is, every one who cares for him."

"Doctor Thayer thinks there will be a change tonight, though it is difficult to tell. Jim's family have my telegram by this time, and they will get my letter to-morrow, probably. Anyway, I shall wait until morning before I send another message."

The tension of their thoughts was too sharp; they turned for relief to the scene before them, stopping at the stile to look back at the steepled white church, standing under its spreading balm-of-Gilead tree.

"It seems strange," said Agatha, "to think that I sat out there under that big tree as a little girl. Everything is so different now."

"Ilion, then, was once your home?"

"No, never my home, though it was once my mother's home. I used to visit here occasionally, years and years ago."

Aleck produced his quizzical grin. "A gallant person would protest that that is incredible."

"I wasn't angling for gallantry," Agatha replied wearily. "I am twenty-six, and I haven't been here certainly since I was eight years old. Eighteen years are a good many."

"To youth, yes," acquiesced Aleck. "Which reminds me, by contrast, of the hermit; he was so incredibly old. It was he who unwittingly put me on Jim's track. He said that the owner or proprietor of the *Jeanne D'Arc* was dropped ashore on his island."

"Monsieur Chatelard?" cried Agatha.

"I don't know his name."

"If it was Monsieur Chatelard," Agatha paused, looking earnestly at Aleck, "if it was he, it is the man who tricked me into his motor-car in New York, drugged me and carried me aboard his yacht while I was unconscious."

Aleck turned a sharp, though not unsympathetic, gaze upon Agatha. "I have told no one but Doctor Thayer, and he did not believe me. But it is quite true; the wreck saved me, probably, from something worse, though I don't know what."

If there had been skepticism on Aleck's face for an instant it had disappeared. Instead, there was deep concern, as he considered the case.

"Had you ever seen the man Chatelard before?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"Did he visit you on board the yacht?"

"Only once. I was put into the charge of an old lady, a Frenchwoman, Madame Sofie; evidently a trusted chaperon, or nurse, or something like that. When I came to myself in a very luxurious cabin in the yacht, this old woman was talking to me in French—a strange medley that I could make nothing of. When I was better she questioned me about everything, saying '*Mon Dieu!*' at every answer I made. Then she left me and was gone a long time; and when she came back, that man was with her. I learned afterward that he was called Monsieur Chatelard. They both looked at me, arguing fiercely in such a furious French that I could not understand more than half they said. They looked as if they were appraising me, like an article for sale, but Madame Sofie held out steadily, on some point, against Monsieur Chatelard, and finally it appeared that she converted him to her own point of view. He went away very angry, and I did not see him again, except at a distance, until the night of the wreck."

"Did you find out where they were going, or who was back of their scheme?"

"No, nothing; or very little. There was money involved. I could tell that. But no names were mentioned, nor any places that I can remember. You see, I was ill from the effects of the chloroform, and frightened, too, I think."

"I don't wonder," said Aleck, wrinkling his homely face. He remained silent while he searched, mentally, for a clue.

"I found out, through my maid, who arrived today, that some one of the kidnapping party had been clever enough to send a false message to the hotel, explaining my sudden departure."

"I see, I see," said Aleck, going over the story in his mind. And presently, "Where does Hand come in? And how did Jim happen to be aboard the *Jeanne D'Arc*?"

"Hand was some sort of henchman to Monsieur Chatelard, I believe. And he told me that your cousin was picked up in New York harbor, swimming for life, it appeared. No one seemed to know any more."

Aleck stopped short, looked at Agatha, pursed his lips for a whistle and remained silent. They had arrived at the porch steps, and were tacitly waiting for the doctors to descend and give them, if possible, some encouragement for the coming night. But the story of the *Jeanne D'Arc* had grown more complicated than Aleck had anticipated, and much was yet to be explained. Aleck was slow, as always, in thinking it through, but he figured it out, finally, to a certain point, and expressed himself thus: "That's the way with your steady fellows; they're all the bigger fools when they do jump."

"Pardon me, I didn't catch—"

"Oh, nothing," said Aleck, half irritably. "I only said Jim needed a poke, like that heifer over in the next field."

Agatha understood the boyish irritation, cloaking the love of the man. "You may be able to get more information about your cousin from Mr. Hand," she said. "He would be likely to know as much as anybody."

"Well, however it happened, he's here now!"

"Though if it had not been for his fearful struggle for me, he would not have been so ill," said Agatha miserably. Aleck, with one foot on the low step of the piazza, stopped and turned squarely toward her. His face was no less miserable than Agatha's, but behind his wretchedness and anxiety was some masculine reserve of power, and a longer view down the corridors of time. He held her eye with a look of great earnestness.

"I love old Jim, Miss Redmond. We've been boys and men together, and good fellows always. But don't think that I'd regret his struggle for you, as you call it, even if it should mean the worst. He couldn't have done otherwise, and I wouldn't have had him. And if it's to be a—a home run—why, then, Jim would like that far better than to die of old age or liver complaint. It's all right, Miss Redmond."

Aleck's slow words came with a double meaning to Agatha. She heard, through them, echoes of James Hambleton's boyhood; she saw a picture of his straight and dauntless youth. She held out to Aleck a hand that trembled, but her face shone with gratitude.

Aleck took her hand respectfully, kindly, in his warm grasp. "Besides," he said simply, "we won't give up. He's got a fighting chance yet."

CHAPTER XVII

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Lights in a country house at night are often the signal of birth or death, sometimes of both. The old red house threw its beacon from almost every window that night, and seemed mutely to defy the onslaught of enveloping darkness, whether Plutonic or Stygian. Time was when Parson Thayer's library lamp burned nightly into the little hours, and through the uncurtained windows the churchyard ghosts, had they wandered that way, could have seen his long thin form, wrapped in a paisley cloth dressing-gown, sitting in the glow. He would have been reading some old leather-bound volume, and would have remained for hours almost as quiet and noiseless as the ghosts themselves. Now he had stepped across his threshold and joined them, and new spirits had come to burn the light in the old red house.

Agatha, half-dressed, had slept, and woke feeling that the night must be far advanced. The house was very still, with no sound or echo of the incoherent tones which, for now many days, had come from the room down the hall. She lit a candle, and the sputtering match seemed to fill the house with noise. Her clock indicated a little past midnight. It was only twenty minutes since she had lain down, but she was wide awake and refreshed. While she was pinning up her hair in a big mass on the top of her head, she heard in the hall slow, steady steps, firm but not heavy, even as in daytime. Susan Stoddard did not tiptoe.

Agatha was at the door before she could knock.

"You had better come for a few minutes," Mrs. Stoddard said. The tones were, in themselves, an adjuration to faith and fortitude.

"Yes, I will come," said Agatha. They walked together down the dimly lighted hall, each woman, in her own way, proving how strong and efficient is the discipline of self-control.

In the sick-room a screen shaded the light from the bed, which had been pulled out almost into the middle of the room. Near the bed was a table with bottles, glasses, a covered pitcher, and on the floor an oxygen tank. Doctor Thayer's massive figure was in the shadow close to the bed, and Aleck Van Camp leaned over the curved footboard. James lay on his pillow, a ghost of a man, still as death itself. As Agatha grew accustomed to the light, she saw that his eyes were closed, the lips under the ragged beard were drawn and slightly parted; his forehead was the pallid forehead of death-in-life. Neither the doctor nor Aleck moved or turned their gaze from the bed as Agatha and Mrs. Stoddard entered. The air was still, and the profound silence without was as a mighty reservoir for the silence within.

Agatha stood by the footboard beside Aleck, while Mrs. Stoddard, getting a warm freestone from the invisible Mr. Hand in the hall, placed it beneath the bedclothes. Aleck Van Camp dropped his head, covering his face with his hands. Agatha, watching, by and by saw a change come over the sick man's face. She held her breath, it seemed, for untold minutes, while Doctor Thayer reached his hand to the patient's heart and leaned over to observe more closely his face.

"See!" she whispered to Aleck, touching his shoulder lightly, "he is looking at us." When Aleck looked up James was indeed looking at them with large, serious, half-focussed eyes. It was as if he were coming back from another world where the laws of vision were different, and he

was only partially adjusted to the present conditions. He moved his hands feebly under the bedclothes, where they were being warmed by the freestone, and then tried to moisten his lips. Agatha took a glass of water from the table, looked about for a napkin, but, seeing none, wet the tips of her fingers and placed them gently over James's lips. His eyes followed her at first, but closed for an instant as she came near. When they opened again, they looked more natural. As he felt the comfort of the water on his lips, his features relaxed, and a look of recognition illumined his face. His eyes moved from Agatha to Aleck, who was now bending over him, and back to Agatha. The look was a salute, happy and peaceful. Then his eyes closed again.

For an hour Agatha and Aleck kept their watch, almost fearing to breathe. Doctor Thayer worked, gave quiet orders, tested the heartbeats, let no movement or symptom go unnoticed. For a time James kept even the doctor in doubt whether he was slipping into the Great Unknown or into a deep and convalescent sleep. By the end of the hour, however, Jimsy had decided for natural sleep, urged thereto, perhaps, by that unseen playwright who had decreed another time for the curtain; or perhaps he was kept by Doctor Thayer's professional persuasions, in defiance of the prompter's signal. However the case, the heart slowly but surely began to take up its job like an honest force-pump, the face began to lose its death-like pallor, the breathing became more nearly normal. Doctor Thayer, with Mrs. Stoddard quiet and efficient at his elbow, worked and tested and worked again, and finally sat moveless for some minutes, watch in hand, counting the pulsations of James's heart. At the end of the time he laid the hand carefully back under the clothes, put his watch in his pocket, and finally got up and looked around the room.

Mrs. Stoddard was pouring something into a measuring glass. Agatha was standing by the window, looking out into the blue night; and Aleck could be seen through the half-open door, pacing up and down the hall. Doctor Thayer turned to his sister.

"Give him his medicine on the half-hour, and then you go to bed. That man Hand will do now." Then he went to the door and addressed Aleck. "Well, Mr. Van Camp, unless something unexpected turns up, I think your cousin will live to jump overboard again."

Offhand as the words were, there was unmistakable satisfaction, happiness, even triumph in his voice, and he returned Aleck's hand-clasp with a vise-like grip. His masculinity ignored Agatha, or pretended to; but she had followed him to the door. As the old man clasped hands with Aleck, he heard behind him a deep, "O Doctor!" The next instant Agatha's arms were around his neck, and the back of his bald head was pressed against something that could only have been a cheek. Surprising as this was, the doctor did not stampede; but by the time he had got clear of Aleck and had reached up his hand to find the cheek, it was gone, and the arms, too. Susan Stoddard somehow got mixed up in the general *Te Deum* in the hall, and for the first time, now that the fight was over, allowed her feminine feelings—that is, a few tears—to come to the surface.

Aleck, however, went to pieces, gone down in that species of mental collapse by which deliberate, judicial men become reckless, and strong men become weak. He stepped softly back into the bedroom and leaned again over the curved footboard, his face quite miserable. He went nearer, and held his ear down close to the bedclothes, to hear for himself the regular beating of the heart. Slowly he convinced himself that the doctor's words might possibly be true, at least. He turned to Hand, who had come in and was adjusting the shades, and asked him: "Do *you* believe he's asleep?" in the tone of one who demands an oath.

"Oh, yes, sir; he's sleeping nicely, Mr. Van Camp. I saw the change the moment I came in."

Aleck still hesitated to leave, fearful, apparently, lest he might take the blessed sleep away with him. As he stood by the bed, a low but distinct whistle sounded outside, then, after a moment's interval, was repeated. Aleck lifted his head at the first signal, took another look at James and one at Hand, then light as a cat he darted from the room and down the stairs, leaving the house through one of the tall windows in the parlor. Mr. Chamberlain was standing near the lilac bushes, his big figure outlined dimly in the darkness.

"Shut up!" Aleck whispered fiercely, as he ran toward him. "He's just got to sleep, Chamberlain; gone to sleep, like a baby. Don't make an infernal racket!"

"Oh, I didn't know. Didn't mean to make a racket," began Chamberlain, when Aleck plumped into him and shook him by the shoulders.

"He's asleep—like a baby!" he reiterated. And Chamberlain, wise comrade, took Aleck by the arm and tramped him off over the hill to settle his nerves. They walked for an hour arm in arm over the road that lay like a gray ribbon before them in the night, winding up slantwise along the rugged country.

Dawn was awake on the hills a mile away, and by and by Aleck found tongue to tell the story of the night, which was good for him. He talked fast and unevenly, and even extravagantly. Chamberlain listened and loved his friend in a sympathy that spoke for itself, though his words were commonplace enough. By the time they had circled the five-mile road and were near the house again, Aleck was something like himself, though still unusually excited. Chamberlain mentioned casually that Miss Reynier had been anxious about him, and that all his friends at the big hotel had worried. Finally, he, Chamberlain, had set out for the old red house, thinking he

could possibly be of service; in any case glad to be near his friend.

"And, by the way," Chamberlain added; "you may be interested to hear that accidentally I got on the track of that beggar who ate the hermit's eggs. Took a tramp this morning, and found him held up at a kind of sailor's inn, waiting for money. Grouchy old party; no wonder his men shipped him."

Aleck at first took but feeble interest in Chamberlain's discoveries; he was still far from being his precise, judicial self. He let Chamberlain talk on, scarcely noticing what he said, until suddenly the identity of the man whom Chamberlain was describing came home to him. Agatha's story flashed back in his memory. He stopped short in his tracks, halting his companion with a stretched-out forefinger.

"Look here, Chamberlain," he said, "I've been half loony and didn't take in what you said. If that's the owner or proprietor of the *Jeanne D'Arc*—a man known as Monsieur Chatelard, French accent, blond, above medium size, prominent white teeth—we want him right away. He kidnapped Miss Redmond in New York, and I shouldn't wonder if he kidnapped old Jim and stole the yacht besides. He's a bad one."

Mr. Chamberlain had the air of humoring a lunatic. "Well, what's to be done? Is it a case for the law? Is there any evidence to be had?"

"Law! Evidence!" cried Aleck. "I should think so. You go to Big Simon, Chamberlain, and find out who's sheriff, and we'll get a warrant and run him down. Heavens! A man like that would sell his mother!"

Chamberlain looked frankly skeptical, and would not budge until Aleck had related every circumstance that he knew about Agatha's involuntary flight from New York. He was all for going to the red house and interviewing Agatha herself, but Aleck refused to let him do that.

"She's worn out and gone to bed; you can't see her. But it's straight, you take my word. We must catch that scoundrel and bring him here for identification—to be sure there's no mistake. And if it is he, it'll be hot enough for him."

Chamberlain doubted whether it was the same man, and put up objections seriatim to each proposition of Aleck's, but finally accepted them all. He made a point, however, of going on his quest alone.

"You go back to the red house and go to bed, and I'll round up Eggs. I think I know how the trick can be done."

Aleck was stubborn about accompanying Chamberlain, but the Englishman plainly wouldn't have it. He told Aleck he could do it better alone, and led him by the arm back to the old red house, where the kitchen door stood hospitably open. Sallie was at work in her pantry. The kettle was singing on the stove, and the milk had already come from a neighbor's dairy.

Sallie's temper may not have been ideal, but at least she was not of those who are grouchy before breakfast. She served Aleck and Chamberlain in the kitchen with homely skill, giving them both a wholesome and pleasant morning after their night of gloom.

"You can't do anything right all day if you start behindhand," she replied when Aleck remarked upon her early rising. "Besides, I was up last night more than once, watching for Miss Redmond. The young man's sleeping nicely, she says."

She went cheerfully about her kitchen work, giving the men her best, womanlike, and asking nothing in return, not even attention. They took her service gratefully, however, and there was enough of Eve in Sallie to know it.

"By the way, Chamberlain," said Aleck, "we must get a telegram off to the family in Lynn." He wrote out the address and shoved it across Sallie's red kitchen tablecloth. "And tell them not to think of coming!" adjured Aleck. "We don't want any more of a swarry here than we've got now." Chamberlain undertook to send the message; and since he had contracted to catch the criminal of the *Jeanne D'Arc*, he was eager to be off on his hunt.

"Good-by, old man. You go to bed and get a good sleep. I'll stop at the hotel and leave word for Miss Reynier. And you stay here, so I'll know where you are. I may want to find you quick, if I land that bloomin' beggar."

"Thanks," said Aleck weakly. "I'll turn in for an hour or so, if Sallie can find me a bed."

Mr. Chamberlain made several notes on an envelope which he pulled from his pocket, gravely thanked Sallie for her breakfast and lifted his hat to her when he departed. Aleck dropped into a chair and was stupidly staring at the stove when Sallie returned from a journey to the pump in the yard.

"You'll like to take a little rest, Mr. Van Camp," she said, "and I know just the place where you'll not hear a sound from anywhere—if you don't mind there not being a carpet. I'll go up right

away and show you the room before I knead out my bread." So she conducted Aleck to a big, clean attic under the rafters, remote and quiet. He was exhausted, not from lack of sleep—he had often borne many hours of wakefulness and hard work without turning a hair—but from the jarring of a live nerve throughout the night of anxiety. The past, and the relationships of youth and kindred were sacred to him, and his pain had overshadowed, for the hour at least, even the newer claims of his love for Mélanie Reynier.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SPIRIT OF THE ANCIENT WOOD

Agatha's first thought on awakening late in the forenoon, was the memory of Sallie Kingsbury coaxing her to bed and tucking her in, in the purple light of the early morning. She remembered the attention with pleasure and gratitude, as another blessing added to the greater one of James Hambleton's turn toward recovery. Sallie's act was mute testimony that Agatha was, in truth, heir to Hercules Thayer's estate, spiritual and material.

She summoned Lizzie, and while she was dressing, laid out directions for the day. During her short stay in Ilion, Lizzie had been diligent enough in gathering items of information, but nevertheless she had remained oblivious of any impending crisis during the night. Her pompadour was marcelled as accurately as if she were expecting a morning call from Mr. Straker. No rustlings of the wings of the Angel of Death had disturbed her sleep. In fact, Lizzie would have winked knowingly if his visit had been announced to her. Her sophistication had banished such superstitions. She noticed, however, that Agatha's candles had burned to their sockets, and inquired if Miss Redmond had been wakeful.

"Mr. Hambleton was very ill. Everybody in the house was up till near morning," replied Agatha rather tartly.

"Oh, what a pity! Could I have done anything? I never heard a sound," cried Lizzie effusively.

"No, there was nothing you could have done," said Agatha.

"It's very bad for your voice, Miss Redmond, staying up all night," went on Lizzie solicitously. "You're quite pale this morning. And with your western tour ahead of you!"

Agatha let these adjurations go unanswered. It occurred to Lizzie that possibly she had allied herself with a mistress who was foolish enough to ruin her public career by private follies, such as worrying about sick people. Heaven, in Lizzie's eyes, was the glare of publicity; and since she was unable to shine in it herself, she loved to be attached to somebody who could. Her fidelity was based on Agatha's celebrity as a singer. She would have preferred serving an actress who was all the rage, but considered a popular singer, who paid liberally, as the next best thing.

There was always enough common sense in Lizzie's remarks to make some impression, even on a person capable of the folly of mourning at a death bed. Agatha's spirits, freshened by hope and the sleep of health, rose to a buoyancy which was well able to deal with practical questions. She quickly formed a plan for the day, though she was wise enough to withhold the scheme from the maid.

Agatha drank her coffee, ate sparingly of Sallie's toast, and, leaving Lizzie with a piece of sewing to do, went first to James Hambleton's room. After ten minutes or so, she slowly descended the stairs and went out the front way. She circled the garden and came round to the open kitchen door. Sallie was kneeling before her oven, inspecting bread. Agatha, watched her while she tapped the bottom of the tin, held her face down close to the loaf, and finally took the whole baking out of the oven and tipped the tins on the table.

"That's the most delicious smell that ever was!" said Agatha.

Sallie jumped up and pulled her apron straight.

"Lor', Miss Redmond, how you scared me! Couldn't you sleep any longer?"

"I didn't want to; I'm as good as new. Tell me, Sallie, where all the people are. Mr. Hand is in Mr. Hambleton's room, I know, but where are the others?"

"I guess they're all parceled round," said Sallie with symptoms of sniffing. "I don't wanter complain, Miss Redmond, but we ain't had any such a houseful since Parson Thayer's last conference met here, and not so many then; only three ministers and two wives, though, of course, ministers make more work. But I wouldn't say a word, Miss Redmond, about the work, if it wasn't for that young woman that puts on such airs coming and getting your tray. I ain't used to that."

Sallie paused, like any good orator, while her main thesis gained impressiveness from silence. It was only too evident that her feelings were hurt.

Agatha considered the matter, but before replying came farther into the kitchen and touched the tip of a finger to one of Sallie's loaves, lifting it to show its golden brown crust.

"You're an expert at bread, Sallie, I can see that," she said heartily. "I shouldn't have got over my accident half so well if it hadn't been for your good food and your care, and I want you to know that I appreciate it." She was reluctant to discuss the maid, but her cordial liking for Sallie counseled frankness. "Don't mind about Lizzie. I thought you had too much to do, and that she might just as well help you, but if she bothers you, we won't have it. And now tell me where Mrs. Stoddard and the others are."

Sallie's symptoms indicated that she was about to be propitiated; but she had yet a desire to make her position clear to Miss Redmond. "It's all right; only I've taken care of the china for seventeen years, and it don't seem right to let her handle it. And she told me herself that anybody that had any respect for their hands wouldn't do kitchen work. And if her hands are too good for kitchen work, I'm sure I don't want her messing round here. She left the tea on the stove till it *boiled*, Miss Redmond, just yesterday."

Agatha smiled. "I'm sure Lizzie doesn't know anything about cooking, Sallie, and she shall not bother you any more."

Sallie turned a rather less melancholy face toward Agatha. "It's been fairly lonesome since the parson died. I'm glad you've come to the red house." The words came from Sallie's lips gruffly and ungraciously, but Agatha knew that they were sincere. She knew better, however, than to appear to notice them. In a moment Sallie went on: "Mrs. Stoddard, she's asleep in the front spare room. Said for me to call her at twelve."

"Poor woman! She must be tired," said Agatha.

"Aunt Susan's a stout woman, Miss Redmond. She didn't go to bed until she'd had prayers beside the young man's bed, with Mr. Hand present. I had to wait with the coffee. And I guess Mr. Hand ain't very much used to our ways, for when Aunt Susan had made a prayer, Mr. Hand said, 'Yes, ma'am!' instead of Amen."

There was a mixture of disapprobation and grim humor which did not escape Agatha. She was again beguiled into a smile, though Sallie remained grave as a tombstone.

"Mr. Hand will learn," said Agatha; and was about to add "Like the rest of us," but thought better of it. Sallie took up her tale.

"Mr. Van Camp and his friend came in just after I'd put you to bed, Miss Redmond, and ate a bite of breakfast right offer that table; and 'twas a mercy I'd cleared all the kulch outer the attic, as I did last week, for Mr. Van Camp he wanted a place to sleep; and he's up there now. Used to be a whole lot er the parson's books up there; but I put them on a shelf in the spare room. The other man went off toward the village."

Agatha, looking about the pleasant kitchen, was tempted to linger. Sallie's conversation yielded, to the discerning, something of the rich essence of the past; and Agatha began to yearn for a better knowledge of the recluse who had been her friend, unknown, through all the years. But she remembered her industrious plans for the day and postponed her talk with Sallie.

"I remember there used to be a grove, a stretch of wood, somewhere beyond the church, Sallie. Which way is it—along the path that goes through the churchyard?"

"No, this way; right back er the yard. Parson Thayer he used to walk that way quite often." Sallie went with Agatha to another stile beyond the churchyard, and pointed over the pasture to a fringe of dark trees along the farther border. "Right there by that apple tree, the path is. But don't go far, Miss Redmond; the woods ain't healthy."

"All right, Sallie; thank you. I'll not stay long." She called Danny and started out through the pasture, with the hound, sober and dignified and happy, at her heels.

The wood was cool and dim, with an uneven wagon road winding in and out between stumps. Enormous sugar-maples reared their forms here and there; occasionally a lithe birch lifted a tossing head; and, farther within, pines shot their straight trunks, arrow-like, up to the canopy above.

Farther along, the road widened into a little clearing, beyond which the birch and maple trees gave place entirely to pines and hemlocks. The underbrush disappeared, and a brown carpet of needles and cones spread far under the shade. The leafy rustle of the deciduous trees ceased, and a majestic stillness, deeper than thought, pervaded the place. At the clearing just within this deeper wood Agatha paused, sat down on a stone and took Danny's head in her lap. The dog looked up into her face with the wistful, melancholy gaze of his kind, inarticulate yet eloquent.

The sun was nearly at zenith, and bright flecks of light lay here and there over the brown earth. As Agatha grew accustomed to the shade, it seemed pleasant and not at all uncheerful—the gaiety of sunlight subdued only to a softer tone. The resolution which had brought her thither returned. She stood up under the dome of pines and began softly to sing, trying her voice first in single tones, then a scale or two, a trill. At first her voice was not clear, but as she continued it emerged from its sheath of huskiness clear and flutelike, and liquid as the notes of the thrushes that inhabited the wood. The pleasure of the exercise grew, and presently, warbling her songs there in the otherwise silent forest, Agatha became conscious of a strange accompaniment. Pausing a moment, she perceived that the grove was vocal with tone long after her voice had ceased. It was not exactly an echo, but a slowly receding resonance, faint duplications and multiplications of her voice, gently floating into the thickness of the forest.

Charmed, like a child who discovers some curious phenomenon of nature, Agatha tried her voice again and again, listening, between whiles, to the ghostly tones reverberating among the pines. She sang the slow majestic "Lascia ch'io pianga," which has tested every singer's voice since Händel wrote it; and then, curious, she tried the effect of the aërial sounding-board with quick, brilliant runs up and down the full range of the voice. But the effect was more beautiful with something melodious and somewhat slow; and there came to her mind an old-fashioned song which, as a girl, she had often sung with her mother:

> "Oh! that we two were maying
> Down the stream of the soft spring breeze."

She sang the stanza through, softly, walking up and down among the pines. Danny, at first, walked up and down beside her gravely, and then lay down in the middle of the path, keeping an eye on Agatha's movements. Her voice, pitched at its softest, now seemed to be infinitely enlarged without being made louder. It carried far in among the trees, clear and soft as a wave-ripple. Entranced, Agatha began the second part of the song, just for the joy of singing:

> "Oh! that we two sat dreaming
> On the sward of some sheep-trimmed down—"

when suddenly, from the distance, another voice took up the strain. Danny was instantly up and off to investigate, but presently came back wagging and begging his mistress to follow him.

In spite of her surprise in hearing another voice complete the duet, Agatha went on with the song, half singing, half humming. It was a woman's voice that joined hers, singing the part quite according to the book:

> "With our limbs at rest on the quiet earth's breast
> And our souls at home with God!"

The pine canopy spread the voices, first one and then the other, until the wood was like a vast cathedral filled with the softest music of the organ pipes.

There was nobody in sight at first, but as Agatha followed the path, she presently saw a white arm and skirt projecting from behind the trunk of a tree. Danny, wagging slowly, appeared to wish to make friends, and before Agatha had time to wonder, the stranger emerged and came toward her with outstretched hand.

"Ah, forgive me! I hid and then startled you; but I was tempted by the song. And this forest temple—isn't it wonderful?"

Agatha looked at the stranger, suddenly wondering if she were not some familiar but half-forgotten acquaintance of years agone. She was a beautiful dark woman, probably two or three years older than herself, mature and self-poised as only a woman of the cosmopolitan world can be. It might be that compared to her Agatha was a bit crude and unfinished, with the years of her full blossoming yet to come. She had no words at the moment, and the older woman, still holding Agatha's hand, explained.

"I did not mean to steal in upon you; but as I came into the grove I heard you singing Händel, and I couldn't resist listening. Your voice, it is wonderful! Especially here!" As she looked into Agatha's face, her sincere eyes and voice gave the praise that no one can resist, the tribute of one artist to another.

"This is, indeed, a beautiful hall. I found it out just now by accident, when I came up here to practice and see if I had any voice left," said Agatha. She paused, as it suddenly occurred to her that the visitor might be James Hambleton's sister and that she was being delinquent as a hostess. "But come back to the house," she said. "This is not a hospitable place, exactly, to receive a guest."

The stranger laughed gently. "Have you guessed who I am, then? No? Well, you see I had the advantage of you from the first. You are Miss Redmond, and I followed you here from the house, where your servant gave me the directions. I am Miss Reynier, Mélanie Reynier, and I am staying at the Hillside. Mr. Van Camp—" and to her own great surprise, Mélanie blushed crimson at this point—"that is, we, my aunt and I, were Mr. Van Camp's guests on board the *Sea Gull*. When he

heard of the wreck of the *Jeanne D'Arc* we put in to Charlesport; though he has probably explained all this to you. It was such a relief and pleasure to Mr. Van Camp to find his cousin, ill as he was; for he had feared the worst."

Agatha had not heard Miss Reynier's name before, but she knew vaguely that Mr. Van Camp had been with a yachting party when he arrived at Charlesport. Now that she was face to face with Miss Reynier, a keen liking and interest, a quick confidence, rose in her heart for her.

"Then perhaps you know Mr. Hambleton," said Agatha impulsively. "The fever turned last night. Were you told that he is better?"

"No, I don't know him," said Mélanie, shaking her head. "Nevertheless, I am heartily glad to hear that he is better. *Much* better, they said at the house."

They had been standing at the place where Agatha had first discovered her visitor, but now they turned back into the clearing.

"Come and try the organ pipes again," she begged. They walked about the wood, singing first one strain and then another, testing the curiously beautiful properties of the pine dome. They were quickly on a footing of friendliness. It was evident that each was capable of laying aside formality, when she wished to do so, and each was, at heart, frank and sincere. Mélanie's talent for song was not small, yet she recognized in Agatha a superior gift; while, to Agatha, Mélanie Reynier seemed increasingly mature, polished, full of charm.

They left the wood and wandered back through the pasture and over the stile, each learning many things in regard to the other. They spoke of the place and its beauty, and Agatha told Mélanie of the childhood memories which, for the first time, she had revived in their living background.

"How our thoughts change!" she said at last. "As a child, I never felt this farm to be lonely; it was the most populous and entertaining place in all the world. I much preferred the wood to anything in the city. I love it now, too; but it seems the essence of solitude to me."

"That is because you have been where the passions and restlessness of men have centered. One is never the same after that."

"Strangely enough, the place now belongs to me," went on Agatha. "Parson Thayer, the former owner and resident, was my mother's guardian and friend, and left the place to me for her sake."

"Ah, that is well!" cried Mélanie. "It will be your castle of retreat, your Sans-Souci, for all your life, I envy you! It is charming. Pastor—Parson, do you say?—Parson Thayer was a man of judgment."

"Yes, and a man of strange and dominating personality, in his way. Everything about the house speaks of him and his tastes. Even Danny here follows me, I really believe, because I am beginning to appreciate his former master."

Agatha stooped and patted the dog's head. Youth and health, helped by the sympathy of a friend, were working wonders in Agatha. She beamed with happiness.

"Come into the house," she begged Mélanie, "and look at some of his books with me. But first we'll find Sallie and get luncheon, and perhaps Mr. Van Camp will appear by that time. Poor man, he was quite worn out. Then you shall see Parson Thayer's books and flowers, if you will."

They strolled over the velvet lawn toward the front of the house, where the door and the long windows stood open. Down by the road, and close to the lilac bushes that flanked the gateway, stood a large silver-white automobile—evidently Miss Reynier's conveyance. The driver of the machine had disappeared.

"I mustn't trespass on your kindness for luncheon to-day, thank you," Mélanie was saying; "but I'll come again soon, if I may." Meantime she was moving slowly down the walk. But Agatha would not have it so. She clung to this woman friend with an unwonted eagerness, begging her to stay.

"We are quite alone, and we have been so miserable over Mr. Hambleton's illness," she pleaded quite illogically. "Do stay and cheer us up!"

And so Mélanie was persuaded; easily, too, except for her compunctions about abusing the hospitality of a household whose first care must necessarily be for the sick.

"I want to stay," she said frankly. "The house breathes the very air of restfulness itself; and I haven't seen the garden at all!" She walked back over the lawn, looked admiringly out toward the garden, with its purple and yellow flowers, then gazed into the lofty thicket above her head, where the high elm spread its century-old branches. Agatha, standing a little apart and looking at Melanie, was again struck by some haunting familiarity about her face and figure. She wondered where she could have seen Miss Reynier before.

Aleck Van Camp, appearing round the corner of the house, made elaborate bows to the two ladles.

"Good morning, Miss Redmond!" He greeted her cordially, plainly glad to see her. "I slept the sleep of the blest up there in your fragrant loft. Good morning, Miss Reynier!" He walked over and formally took Mélanie's hand for an instant. "I knew it was decreed that you two should be friends," he went on, in his deliberate way. "In fact, I've been waiting for the moment when I could have the pleasure of introducing you myself, and here you have managed to dispense with my services altogether. But let me escort you into the house. Sallie says her raised biscuits are all ready for luncheon."

Agatha, looking at her new friend's vivid face, saw that Mr. Van Camp was not an unwelcome addition to their number. She had a quick superstitious feeling of happiness at the thought that the old red house, gathering elements of joy about its roof, was her possession and her home.

"I've promised to show Miss Reynier some queer old books after luncheon," she said.

Aleck wrinkled his brow. "I'll try not to be jealous of them."

CHAPTER XIX

MR. CHAMBERLAIN, SLEUTH

Unbeknown to himself, Mr. Chamberlain possessed the soul of a conspirator. Leaving Aleck Van Camp at the crisp edge of the day, he fell into deep thought as he walked toward the village. As he reviewed the information he had received, he came more and more to adopt Agatha's cause as his own, and his spirit was fanned into the glow incident to the chase.

He walked briskly over the country road, descended the steep hill, turning over the facts, as he knew them, in his mind. By the time he reached Charlesport, he regarded his honor as a gentleman involved in the capture of the Frenchman. His knowledge of the methods of legal prosecutions, even in his own country, was extremely hazy. He had never been in a situation, in his hitherto peaceful career, in which it had been necessary to appeal to the law, either on his own behalf or on that of his friends.

Legal processes in America were even less known to him, but he was not daunted on that account. He remembered Sherlock Holmes and Raffles; he recalled Bill Sykes and Dubosc, dodging the operations of justice; and in that romantic chamber that lurks somewhere in every man's make-up, he felt that classic tradition had armed him with all the preparation necessary for heroic achievement. He, Chamberlain, was unexpectedly called upon to act as an agent of justice against chicanery and violence, and it was not in him to shirk the task. His labors, which, for the greater part of his life, had been expended in tracing the evolution of blind fish in inland caves, had not especially fitted him for dealing with the details of such a case as Agatha's; but they had left him eminently well equipped for discerning right principles and embracing them.

Chamberlain's first move was to visit Big Simon, who directed him to the house of the justice of the peace, Israel Cady. Squire Cady, in his shirt-sleeves and wearing an old faded silk hat, was in his side yard endeavoring to coax the fruit down gently from a flourishing pear tree.

"You wait just a minute, if you please, until I get these two plump pears down, and I'll be right there," he called courteously, without looking away from his long-handled wire scoop.

Mr. Chamberlain strolled into the yard, and after watching Squire Cady's exertions for a minute or two, offered to wield the pole himself.

"Takes a pru-uty steady hand to get those big ones off without bruising them," cautioned the squire.

But Chamberlain's hand was steadiness itself, and his eyesight much keener than the old man's. The result was highly satisfactory. No less than a dozen ripe pears were twitched off, just in the nick of time, so far as the eater was concerned.

"Well, thank you, sir; thank you," said Squire Cady. "That just goes to show what the younger generation can do. Now then, let's see. Got any pockets?"

He picked out six of the best pears and piled them in Chamberlain's hands, then took off his rusty, old-fashioned hat and filled it with the rest of the fruit. Chamberlain carefully stowed his treasures into the wide pockets of his tweed suit.

"Now, sir," Squire Cady said heartily, "we'll go into my office and attend to business. I'm not equal to Cincinnatus, whom they found plowing his field, but I can take care of my garden. Come

in, sir, come in."

Chamberlain followed the tall spare old figure into the house. The squire disappeared with his pears, leaving his visitor in the narrow hall; but he returned in a moment and led the way into his office. It was a large, rag-carpeted room, filled with all those worsted knickknacks which women make, and littered comfortably with books and papers.

Squire Cady put on a flowered dressing-gown, drew a pair of spectacles out of a pocket, a bandana handkerchief from another, and requested Chamberlain to sit down and make himself at home. The two men sat facing each other near a tall secretary whose pigeonholes were stuffed with papers in all stages of the yellowing process. Squire Cady's face was yellowing, like his papers, and it was wrinkled and careworn; but his eyes were bright and humorous, and his voice pleasant. Chamberlain thought he liked him.

"Come to get a marriage license?" the squire inquired. Chamberlain immediately decided that he didn't like him, but he foolishly blushed.

"No, it's another sort of matter," he said stiffly,

"Not a marriage license! All right, my boy," agreed Squire Cady. "'Tisn't the fashion to marry young nowadays, I know, though 'twas the fashion in my day. Not a wedding! What then?"

Then Chamberlain set to work to tell his story. Placed, as it were, face to face with the law, he realized that he was but poorly equipped for carrying on actual proceedings, even though they might be against Belial himself; but he made a good front and persuaded Squire Cady that there was something to be done. The squire was visibly affected at the mention of the old red house, and fell into a revery, looking off toward the fields and tapping his spectacles on the desk.

"Hercules Thayer and I read Latin together when we were boys," he said, turning to Chamberlain with a reminiscent smile on his old face. "And he licked me for liking Hannibal better than Scipio." He laughed heartily.

The faces of the old sometimes become like pictured parchments, and seem to be lighted from within by a faint, steady gleam, almost more beautiful than the fire of youth. As Chamberlain looked, he decided once more, and finally, that he liked Squire Cady.

"But I got even with Hercules on Horace," the squire went on, chuckling at his memories. "However," he sighed, as he turned toward his desk again, "this isn't getting out that warrant for you. We don't want any malefactors loose about Charlesport; but you'll have to be sure you know what you're doing. Do you know the man—can you identify him?"

"I think I should know him; but in any case Miss Redmond at the old red house can identify him."

"We don't want to arrest anybody till we're sure we know what we're about—that's poor law," said Squire Cady, in a pedagogical and squire-ish tone, as if Chamberlain were a mere boy. But the Englishman didn't mind that.

"I think I can satisfy you that we've got the right man," he answered. "If I find him and bring him to the old red house this afternoon, so that Miss Redmond can identify him, will you have a sheriff ready to serve the warrant?"

"Yes, I can do that."

"Very well, then, and thank you, sir," said Chamberlain, moving toward the door. "And I'm keen on hearing how you got even with Mr. Thayer on the Horace."

The light behind the squire's parchment face gleamed a moment.

"Come back, my boy, when you've done your duty by the law. Every citizen should be a protector as well as a keeper of the law. So come again; the latch-string is always out."

It was mid-morning before the details connected with the sheriff were completed. By this time Chamberlain's heavy but sound temperament had lifted itself to its task, gaining momentum as the hours went by. His next step was to search out the Frenchman. The meager information obtained the day before was to the effect that the marooned yacht-owner had taken refuge in one of the shacks near the granite docks in the upper part of the village. He had persuaded the caretaker of the Sailors' Reading-room to lend him money with which to telegraph to New York, as the telegraph operator had refused to trust him.

It was not difficult to get on his trade, even though the village people were constitutionally reluctant to let any unnecessary information get away from them. A mile or so farther up the shore, beyond the road that ran like a scar across the hill to the granite quarry, Chamberlain came upon a saloon masquerading as a grocery store. A lodging house, a seaman's Bethel and the Reading-room were grouped near by; the telegraph office, too, had been placed at this end of the town; obviously for the convenience of the operators of the granite quarry. The settlement had the appearance of easy-going and pleasant industry peculiar to places where handwork is still the

rule.

Chamberlain applied first at the grocery store without getting satisfaction. The foreign looking boy, who was the only person visible, could give him no information about anything. But at the Reading-room the erstwhile yacht-owner was known. Borrowing money is a sure method of impressing one's personality.

The Frenchman had been in the neighborhood two or three days, latterly becoming very impatient for a reply to his New York telegram. A good deal of money had been applied for, was the opinion of the money-lender. This person, caretaker and librarian, was a tall, ineffective individual, with eyes set wide apart. His slow speech was a mixture of Doctor Johnson and a judge in chancery. It was grandiloquent, and it often took long to reach the point. He informed Chamberlain, with some circumlocution, that the Frenchman had been extremely anxious over the telegram.

"I tried to persuade him that it was useless to be impatient over such things," said he. "And I regret to say that the man allowed himself to become profane."

"I dare say."

"But it would appear that he has received his telegram by this time," continued the youth, "for it is now but a short time since he was summoned to the station."

Chamberlain, thinking that the sooner he got to the telegraph station the better, was about to depart, when the placid tones of the librarian again casually broke the silence.

"If I mistake not, the gentleman in question is even now hastening toward the village." He waved a vague hand toward the open door through which, a little distance away, a man's figure could be seen.

"Why don't you run after him and get your money?" asked Chamberlain; but he didn't know the youth.

"What good would that do?" was the surprising question, which Chamberlain could not answer.

But the Englishman acted on a different principle. He thanked the judge in chancery and made after the Frenchman, who was casting a furtive eye in this and that direction, as if in doubt which way he ought to go. Nevertheless, he seemed bent on going, and not too slowly, either.

The Englishman swung into the road, but did not endeavor to overtake the other. They were traveling toward the main village, along a road that more or less hugged the shore. Sometimes it topped a cliff that dropped precipitately into the water; and again it descended to a sandy level that was occasionally reached by the higher tides.

Near the main village the road ascended a rather steep bluff, and at the top made a sudden turn toward the town. As Chamberlain approached this point, he yielded more and more to the beauty of the scene. The Bay of Charlesport, the rugged, curving outline of the coast beyond, the green islands, the glistening sea, the blue crystalline sky over all—it was a sight to remember.

Not far from the land, at the near end of the harbor, was the *Sea Gull*, pulling at her mooring. A stone's throw beyond Chamberlain's feet, a small rocky tongue of land was prolonged by a stone breakwater, which sheltered the curved beach of the village from the rougher waves. Close up under the bluff on which he was standing, the waters of the bay churned and foamed against a steep rock-wall that shot downward to unknown depths. It was obviously a dangerous place, though the road was unguarded by fence or railing. Only a delicate fringe of goldenrod and low juniper bushes veiled the treacherous cliff edge. It was almost impossible for a traveler, unused to the region, to pass across the dizzy stretch of highway without a shuddering glance at the murderous waves below.

On the crest of this cliff, each of the two men paused, one following the other at a little distance. The first man, however, paused merely for a few minutes' rest after the steep climb. Chamberlain, hardened to physical exertions, took the hill easily, but stood for a moment lost in speculative wonder at the scene. He kept a sharp eye on his leader, however; and presently the two men took up their Indian file again toward the village.

Some distance farther on, the road forked, one spur leading up over the steep rugged hill, another dropping abruptly to the main village street and the wharves. A third branch ran low athwart the hill and led, finally, to the summer hotel where Chamberlain and the Reyniers had been staying. At this division of the road Chamberlain saw the other man ahead of him sitting on a stone. He approached him leisurely and assumed an air of business sagacity.

"Good day, sir," said Chamberlain, planting himself solidly before the man on the stone. He was rather large, blond, pale and unkempt in appearance; but nevertheless he carried an air of insolent mockery, it seemed to Chamberlain. He glanced disgustedly at the Englishman, but did not reply.

"Rather warm day," remarked Chamberlain pleasantly. No answer. The man sat with his head propped on his hands, unmistakably in a bad temper.

"Want to buy some land?" inquired Chamberlain. "I'm selling off lots on this hill for summer cottages. Water front, dock privileges, and a guaranty that no one shall build where it will shut off your view. Terms reasonable. Like to buy?"

"*Non*!" snarled the other.

Chamberlain paused in his imaginative flight, and took two luscious yellow pears from his bulging pockets.

"Have a pear?" he pleasantly offered.

The man again looked up, as if tempted, but again ejaculated "*Non*!"

Chamberlain leisurely took a satisfying bite.

"I get tired myself," he went on, "tramping over these country roads. But it's the best way for me to do business. You don't happen to want a good hotel, do you?"

Coarse fare and the discomforts of beggars' lodgings had told on the Frenchman's temper, as Chamberlain had surmised. He looked up with a show of human interest. Chamberlain went on.

"There's a fine hotel, the Hillside, over yonder, only a mile or so away. Best place in all the region hereabouts; tip-topping set there, too. Count Somebody-or-Other from Germany, and no end of big-wigs; so of course they have a good cook."

Chamberlain paused and finished his second pear. The man on the stone was furtive and uneasy, but masked his disquiet with the insolent sneering manner that had often served him well. Chamberlain, having once adopted the role of a garrulous traveling salesman, followed it up with zest.

"Of course, a man can get a good meal, for that matter, at the Red House, a little way up yonder over the hill. But it wouldn't suit a man like you—a slow, poky place, with no style."

The man on the stone slowly turned toward Chamberlain, and at last found voice for more than monosyllabic utterances.

"I was looking for a hotel," he said, in correct English but with a foreign accent, "and I shall be glad to take your advice. The Hillside, you say, is in this direction?" and he pointed along the lower road.

"Yes," heartily assented Chamberlain, "about two miles through those woods, and you won't make any mistake going there; it's a very good place."

The man got up from the stone.

"And the other inn you spoke of—where is that?"

"The Red House? That's quite a long piece up over the hill—this way. Straight road; house stands near a church; kept by a country woman named Sallie. But the Hillside's the place for you; good style, everything neat and handsome. And fine people!"

"Very well, thanks," cut in the other, in his sharp, rasping tones. "I shall go to the Hillside."

He slid one hand into a pocket, as if to assure himself that he had not been robbed by sleight-of-hand during the interview, and then started on the road leading to the Hillside. Chamberlain said "Good day, sir," without expecting or getting an answer, and turned down the hill toward the village.

As soon as he had dropped from sight, however, he walked casually into the thick bushes that lined the road, and from this ambush he took a careful survey of the hill behind him. Then he slowly and cautiously made his way back through the underbrush until he was again in sight of the cross-roads. Here, concealed behind a tree, he waited patiently some five or ten minutes. At the end of that time, Chamberlain's mild and kindly face lighted up with unholy joy. He opened his mouth and emitted a soundless "haw-haw."

For there was his recent companion also returning to the cross-roads, taking a discreet look in the direction of the village as he came along. Seeing that the coast was clear, he turned and went rapidly up the road that led over the hill to the old red house.

When Chamberlain saw that the man was well on his way he stepped into the road and solemnly danced three steps of a hornpipe, and the next instant started on a run toward the village. He got little Simon's horse and buggy, drove into the upper street and picked up the sheriff, and then trotted at a good rattling pace around by the long road toward Ilion.

CHAPTER XX

MONSIEUR CHATELARD TAKES THE WHEEL

Sallie Kingsbury would have given up the ghost without more ado, had she known what secular and unministerial passions were converging about Parson Thayer's peaceful library. As it was, she had a distinct feeling that life wasn't as simple as it had been heretofore, and that there were puzzling problems to solve. She was almost certain that she had caught Mr. Hand using an oath; though when she charged him with it, he had said that he had been talking Spanish to himself—he always did when he was alone. Sallie didn't exactly know the answer to that, but told him that she hoped he would remember that she was a professor. "What's that?" inquired Hand.

"It's a Christian in good and regular standing, and it's what you ought to be," said Sallie.

And now that nice Mr. Chamberlain, whom she had fed in the early morning, had dashed up to the kitchen door behind Little Simon's best horse, deposited a man from Charlesport, and then had disappeared. The man had also unceremoniously left her kitchen. He might be a minister brought there to officiate at the church on the following Sabbath, Sallie surmised; but on second thought she dismissed the idea. He didn't look like any minister she had ever seen, and was very far indeed from the Parson Thayer type.

Hercules Thayer's business, including his ministerial duties, had formed the basis and staple of Sallie's affectionate interest for seventeen years, and it wasn't her nature to give up that interest, now that the chief actor had stepped from the stage. So she speculated and wondered, while she did more than her share of the work.

She picked radishes from the garden for supper, threw white screening over the imposing loaves of bread still cooling on the side table, and was sharpening a knife on a whetstone, preparatory to carving thin slices from a veal loaf that stood near by, when she was accosted by some one appearing suddenly in the doorway.

"Is this the Red House?" It was a cool, sharp voice, sounding even more outlandish than Mr. Hand's. Sallie turned deliberately toward the door and surveyed the new-comer.

"Well, yes; I guess so. But you don't need to scare the daylights outer me, that way."

The stranger entered the kitchen and pulled out a chair from the table.

"Give me something to eat and drink—the best you have, and be quick about it, too."

Sallie paused, carving-knife in hand, looking at him with frank curiosity. "Well, I snum! You ain't the new minister either, now, are you?"

The stranger made no answer. He had thrown himself into the chair, as if tired. Suddenly he sat up and looked around alertly, then at Sallie, who was returning his gaze with interest.

"Where are you from, anyway?" she inquired. "We don't see people like you around these parts very often."

"I dare say," he snarled. "Are you going to get me a meal, or must I tramp over these confounded hills all day before I can eat?"

"Oh, I'll get you up a bite, if that's all you want. I never turned anybody away hungry from this door yet, and we've had many a worse looking tramp than you. I guess Miss Redmond won't mind."

"Miss Redmond!" The stranger started to his feet, glowering on Sallie. "Look here! Is this place a hotel, or isn't it?"

"Well, anybody'd think it was, the way I've been driven from pillar to post for the last ten days! But you can stay; I'll get you a meal, and a good one, too."

Sallie's good nature was rewarded by a convulsion of anger on the part of the guest. "Fool! Idiot!" he screamed. "You trick me in here! You lie to me!"

"Oh, set down, set down!" interrupted Sallie. "You don't need to get so het up as all that! I'll get you something to eat. There ain't any hotel within five miles of here—and a poor one at that!" Thus protesting and attempting to soothe, Sallie saw the stranger make a grab for his hat and start for the door, only to find it suddenly shut and locked in his face. Mr. Chamberlain, moreover, was on the inside, facing the foreigner.

"If you will step through the house and go out the other way," Mr. Chamberlain remarked coolly, "it will oblige me. My horse is loose in the yard, and I'm afraid you'll scare him off. He's

shy with strangers."

The two men measured glances.

"I thought you traveled afoot when pursuing your real estate business," sneered the stranger.

"I do, when it suits my purposes," replied Chamberlain.

"What game are you up to, anyway, in this disgusting country?" inquired the other.

"Ridding it of rascals. This way, please;" and Chamberlain pointed before him toward the door leading into the hall. As the stranger turned, his glance fell on Sallie, still carving her veal loaf. "Idiot!" he said disgustedly.

"Well, I haven't been caught yet, anyhow," said Sallie grimly.

Chamberlain's voice interrupted her. "This way, and then the first door on the right. Make haste, if you please, Monsieur Chatelard."

At the name, the stranger turned, standing at bay, but Chamberlain was at his heels. "You see, I know your name. It was supplied me at the Reading-room. Here—on the right—quickly!"

The hall was dim, almost dark, the only light coming from the open doorway on the right. Whether he wished or no, Monsieur Chatelard was forced to advance into the range of the doorway; and once there, he found himself pushed unceremoniously into the room.

It was a large, cool room, lined with bookcases. Near the middle stood an oblong table covered with green felt and supporting an old brass lamp. Four people were in the room, besides the two new-comers. Aleck Van Camp was on a low step-ladder, just in the act of handing down a book from the top shelf. Near the step-ladder two women were standing, with their backs toward the door. Both were in white, both were tall, and both had abundant dark hair. One of the French windows leading out on to the porch was open, and just within the sill stood the man from Charlesport.

"Here's a wonderful book—a rare one—the record of that famous Latin controversy," Aleck was saying, when he became conscious of the entrance of Chamberlain and a stranger.

"Ah, hello, Chamberlain, that you?" he cried. Agatha and Mélanie, turning suddenly to greet Chamberlain, simultaneously encountered the gimlet-gaze of Chatelard. It was fixed first on Mélanie, then on Agatha, then returned to Mélanie with an added increment of rage and bafflement. But he was first to find tongue.

"So!" he sneered. "I find you after all, Princess Auguste Stéphanie of Krolvetz! Consorting with these—these swine!"

Mélanie looked at him keenly, with hesitating suspicions. "Ah! Duke Stephen's cat's-paw! I remember you—well!" But before the words were fairly out of her mouth, Agatha's voice had cut in:

"Mr. Van Camp, that is he! That is he! The man on the *Jeanne D'Arc*!"

"We thought as much," answered Chamberlain. "That's why he is here."

"We only wanted your confirmation of his identity," said the man who had been standing by the window, as he came forward. "Monsieur Chatelard, you are to come with me. I am the sheriff of Charlesport County, and have a warrant for your arrest."

As the sheriff advanced toward Chatelard, the cornered man turned on him with a sound that was half hiss, half an oath. He was like a panther standing at bay. Aleck turned toward Mélanie.

"It seems that you know this man, Mélanie?"

"Yes, I know him—to my sorrow."

"What do you know of him?"

"He is the paid spy of the Duke Stephen, my cousin. He does all his dirty work." Mélanie laughed a bit nervously as she added, turning to Chatelard: "But you are the last man I expected to see here. I suppose you are come from my excellent cousin to find me, eh? Is that the case?"

Chatelard's eyes, resting on her, burned with hate. "Yes, your Highness. I am the humble bearer of a message from Duke Stephen to yourself."

"And that message is—?"

"A command for your immediate return to Krolvetz. Matters of importance await you there."

"And if I refuse to return?"

Chatelard's shoulders went up and his hands spread out in that insolent gesture affected by certain Europeans. Chamberlain stepped forward impatiently.

"Look here, you people," he began, "you told me this chap was a bloomin' kidnapper, and so I rounded him up—I nabbed him. And here you are exchangin' howdy-do. What's the meaning of it all?"

As he spoke, Chamberlain's eyes rested first on Mélanie, then on Agatha, whom he had not seen before. "By Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Whom did he kidnap?" questioned Mélanie.

"Why, *me*, Miss Reynier," cried Agatha. "He stole my car and drugged me and got me into his yacht—Heaven knows why!"

"Kidnapped! You!" cried Mélanie.

"Just so," agreed Aleck. "And now I see why—you scoundrel!" He turned upon Chatelard with contemptuous fury. "For once you were caught, eh? These ladies *are* much alike—that is true. So much so that I myself was taken aback the first time I saw Miss Redmond. You thought Miss Redmond was the princess—masquerading as an opera singer."

"Her Highness has always been admired as a singer!" cut in Chatelard.

"No doubt! And even you were deceived!" Aleck laughed in derision. "But when you take so serious a step as an abduction, my dear man, be sure you get hold of the right victim."

"She was even singing the very song that used to be a favorite of her Highness!" remarked Chatelard.

"Your memory serves you too well."

But Chatelard turned scoffingly toward Agatha. "You sang it well, Mademoiselle, very well. And, as this gentleman asserts, you deceived even me. But you are indiscreet to walk unattended in the park."

Agatha, unnerved and weak, had grown pale with fear.

"Don't talk with him, Mr. Van Camp, he is dangerous. Get him away," she pleaded.

"True, Miss Redmond. We only waste time. Sheriff—"

Again the sheriff advanced toward Chatelard, and again he was warned off with a hissing oath. At the same moment a shadow fell within the other doorway. As Chatelard's glance rested on the figure standing there, his face gleamed. He pointed an accusing forefinger.

"There is the abductor, if any such person is present at all," said he. "That is the man who stole the lady's car and ran it to the dock. He is your man, Mister Sheriff, not I."

The accusation came with such a tone of conviction on the part of the speaker, that for an instant it confused the mind of every one present. In the pause that followed, Chatelard turned with an insolent shrug toward Agatha. "This lady—" and every word had a sneer in it—"this lady will testify that I am right."

Agatha stared with a face of alarm toward the doorway, where Hand stood silent.

"If that is true, Miss Redmond," began the sheriff.

"No—no!" cried Agatha.

"He had nothing to do with it?" questioned the sheriff.

As he waited for her answer, Agatha suddenly came to herself. Her trembling ceased; she looked about upon them all with her truthful eyes; looked upon Hand standing unconcernedly in the doorway, upon Chatelard in the corner gleaming like an oily devil.

"No—he had nothing to do with it," she said.

Chatelard's laugh beat back her words like a bludgeon.

"Liars, all liars!" he cried. "I might have known!"

But Chamberlain was impatient of all this. "And now, Monsieur Kidnapper, you can walk off with this gentleman here. And you can't go one minute too soon. The penitentiary's the place for you."

Chatelard turned on him with another laugh. "You need not feel obliged to hold on to me, Mister Land-Agent. I know when I'm beaten—which you Englishmen never do. Got another of those pears you offered me this morning?"

Before Chamberlain could make reply, or before the sheriff and his prisoner could get to the door, there was the chug of an automobile. A second later urgent and loud voices penetrated the room, first from the steps, then from the hall. One was the hearty voice of a man, the other was Lizzie's.

"Can't see her! Tell me I can't see her after I've run a hundred miles a day into the jungle on purpose to see her! The idea! Where is she? In here?" And in stalked Mr. Straker, with cap, linen duster, and high gaitered boots. He was pulling off his goggles. "Well, what's this? A family party? Where's Miss Redmond?"

"Mr. Straker—" cried Agatha.

"That's me! Oh, there you are! Why don't you open up and get some light? I can't see a thing."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Straker—" Agatha was saying, when suddenly the attention of everybody in the room was drawn outside.

When Chamberlain had told Chatelard that his horse was loose in the yard, it happened to be the truth; now, excited by fear of the strange machine that had just arrived, the horse, with flying bridle-rein, was snorting and prancing on his way to the vegetable garden. It was almost beyond masculine power to resist the impulse of pursuit. Aleck and Chamberlain sprang through the window, the sheriff went as far as the lawn after them, and in that instant Chatelard slipped like an eel through the open door and out to the gate to Straker's machine, still chugging. The sheriff saw him as he jumped in.

"Hey, there!" he shouted, and made a lively run for the gate. But before he reached it, Chatelard had jerked open the lever, loosened the brake, and was passing the church at half speed.

"Hey, there, quick!" called the sheriff. "He's got away!"

But Mr. Hand had already thought what was best to be done.

"Come on, here's another machine. We'll chase him!" he cried, as he went for the white motorcar, standing farther back under the trees. It had to be cranked, which required some seconds, but presently they were off—Hand and the sheriff, in hot pursuit after Straker's car.

Chamberlain and Aleck, triumphantly leading the horse, came back in time to see the settling cloud of dust.

"Mr. Chamberlain—Mr. Van Camp!" cried Agatha. "They've gone! They've got away!"

"Who's got away?" demanded Chamberlain.

"All of them!" groaned Agatha, as she sank down on the piazza steps.

"Jimminy Christmas!" ejaculated Mr. Straker. "This beats any ten-twenty-thirty I ever saw. Regular Dick Deadwood game! And he's run off with my new racer!"

"What!" yelled Chamberlain. "Did that bloomin' sheriff let that bloomin' rascal get away?"

"He isn't anybody I'd care to keep!" chuckled Straker. "But you know that new racer's worth something."

"Did Chatelard go off in that machine?" again inquired Chamberlain slowly and distinctly of the two women.

"Precisely," said Mélanie, while Agatha's bowed head nodded.

"By Jove, that sheriff's a duffer! Here, Van, give me the horse." And with the words Chamberlain grabbed Little Simon's best roadster, mounted him bareback, and turned his head up the road.

"I'll catch him yet!" he yelled back.

But he didn't. Three miles farther along he came upon the wreck. The racer was lying on its side in a ditch which recent rains had converted into a substantial volume of mire and mud. The white machine was drawn cosily up under a spreading hemlock farther on, but Mr. Hand and the sheriff were nowhere in sight.

As Chamberlain stopped to gaze on the overturned car, he heard the crashing of underbrush in the woods near by. The steps came nearer. It was evident the chase was up; they were off the scent and obliged to return.

"Humph!" grunted Chamberlain, and for once the clear springs of his disposition were made turbid with satire. "We're all a pack of bloomin' asses—that's what we are. What in hell's the matter with us!"

While he was tying the horse to a tree, Hand appeared, silent, with an unfathomable disgust written on his countenance. As usual, he who was the least to blame came in for the hottest of the censure; and yet, there was a sort of fellowship indicated by Chamberlain's extraordinary arraignment of them both. He was scarcely known ever to have been profane, but at this moment he searched for wicked words and interspersed his speech with them recklessly, if not with skill. It is the duty of the historian to expurgate.

"I don't know just how you happen to be in this game," pronounced Chamberlain hotly, "but all I've got to say is you're an ass—an infernal ass."

Hand, rolling up his sleeves, remained silent.

"I suppose if you'd had a perfectly good million-dollar bank-note, you'd have let it blow away—piff! right out of your hands!" he fumed. "Or the title deed to Mount Olympus—or a ticket to a front seat in the New Jerusalem. That's all it amounts to. Catch an eel, only to let him slip through your fingers—eh, you!"

Mr. Hand made no answer. Instead, he waded into the ditch-stream and placed a shoulder under the racing-car. Chamberlain's instinct for doing his share of work caused him to roll up his trousers and wade in, shoulder to shoulder with Hand, even while he was lecturing on the feebleness of man's wits.

"Good horse running loose into barb-wire fences had to be caught, but it didn't need a squadron of men and a forty-acre lot to do it in. Might have known he'd give us the slip if he could—biggest rascal in Europe!" And so on. Chamberlain, usually rather a silent man, blew himself empty for once, conscious all the time that he, himself, was quite as much to blame as Hand could possibly have been. And Hand knew that he knew, but kept his counsel. Hand ought to be prime minister by this time.

When the racing-car was righted, he went swiftly and skilfully to work investigating the damage and putting the machine in order, as far as possible. Chamberlain presently became impressed with his mechanical dexterity.

"By Jove, you can see into her, can't you!" Hand continued silent, and left it to his companion to put on the finishing verbal touches.

"Tow her home and fill her up and she'll be all right, eh?" said Chamberlain, but Hand kept on tinkering. The sudden neighing and plunging of Little Simon's poor tormented horse gave warning of the sheriff, crashing from the underbrush directly into the road.

He was voluble with excuses. The fugitive had escaped, leaving no traces of his flight. He might be in the woods, or he might have run to the railroad track and caught the freight that had just slowly passed. He might be in the next township, or he might be—

"Oh, go to thunder!" said Chamberlain.

CHAPTER XXI

JIMMY REDIVIVUS

If the occupants of the old red house felt over-much inclined to draw a long breath and rest on their oars after their anxiety and recent excitement, Agatha's manager was able to supply a powerful antidote. He was restlessness incarnate.

He was combining a belated summer holiday with what he considered to be good business, "seeing" not only his prima donna secluded at Ilion, but other important people all the way from Portland to Halifax. When he heard that the man who ran off with his racing-car was also responsible for the mysterious departure of Miss Redmond, his excitement was great.

"You mean to say that you were picked up and drugged in broad daylight in New York?" he demanded of Agatha.

"Practically that."

"And you escaped?"

"The yacht foundered."

"And that scamp walked right into your hands and you let him go?"

Agatha forced a rueful smile. "I confess I'm not much used to catching criminals."

Mr. Straker paused, lacking words to express his outraged spirit

"I don't mean you, of course. This whole outfit here—what are they doing? Think they're put on in a walking part, eh? Don't they know enough to go in out of the rain?" Getting no reply to his fuming, he came down from his high horse, curiosity impelling. "What'd he kidnap you for—ransom?"

"No. It seems that he mistook me for Miss Reynier—the lady out there on the lawn talking with Mr. Van Camp."

Mr. Straker bent his intent gaze out of the window.

"I don't see any resemblance at all." His crusty manner implied that Agatha, or somebody, was to blame for all the coil of trouble, and should be made to pay for it.

"Even I was puzzled," smiled Agatha. "I thought she was some one I knew."

"Nonsense!" growled Mr. Straker. "Anybody with two eyes could see the difference. She's older, and heavier. What did the scoundrel want with her?"

"I don't know. She's a princess or something."

Mr. Straker jumped. "She is!" he cried. "Lord, why didn't you tell me?"

"I'm trying to."

"Advertising!" he shouted joyfully. "Jimminy Christmas! We'll make it up—all this time lost. Princess who? Where from? I guess you do look like her, after all. I see it all now—head-lines! 'Strange confusion of identity! Which is the princess?' It'll draw crowds—thousands."

Agatha escaped, leaving Mr. Straker to collect from others the details of his advertising story, which he did with surprising speed and accuracy. By the next morning he had pumped Sallie, Doctor Thayer and Aleck Van Camp, and had extracted the promise of an interview from Miss Reynier herself.

The only really unsatisfactory subject of investigation was Mr. Hand, whom Straker watched for a day or two with growing suspicion. Straker had sputtered, good-naturedly enough, over the "accident" to his racing-car, and had taken it for granted, in rather a high-handed manner, that Mr. Hand was to make repairs. His manner toward the chauffeur was not pleasant, being a combination of the patron and the bully. It was exactly the sort of manner to precipitate civil war, though diplomacy might serve to cover the breach for a time.

But the racing-car, ignominiously towed home by Miss Reynier's white machine, stood undisturbed in one of the open carriage sheds by the church. Eluded by Hand for the space of twenty-four hours, and finding that the injury to the car was far beyond his own mechanical skill to repair, Mr. Straker sent peremptory word to Charlesport and to the Hillside for the services of a mechanician, without satisfaction. Little Simon thought the matter was beyond him, but informed Mr. Straker that perhaps the engineer at the quarry—a native who had "been to Boston" and qualified as chauffeur—would come and look at it.

"Then for Heaven's sake, Colonel, get him to come and be quick about it," adjured Mr. Straker. "And tell him for me that there's a long-yellow for him if he'll make the thing right."

"He'll charge you two dollars an hour, including time on the road," solemnly announced Little Simon, unimpressed by any mention of the long-yellow. Had Little Simon "liked," he could probably have mended the car himself, but Mr. Straker's manner, so effective on Broadway, was not to the taste of these country people. He thought of them in their poverty as "peasants," but without the kindliness of the born gentleman. What Aleck Van Camp could have got for love, Mr. Straker could not buy; and he was at last obliged to appeal to Hand through Agatha's agency.

"I'll look at it again," Hand replied shortly, when Agatha addressed him on the subject.

The car being temporarily out of commission, it was necessary for Mr. Straker to adopt some other means of making himself and everybody about him extremely busy. He took a fancy for yachting, and got himself diligently instructed in an art which, of all arts, must be absorbed with the mother's milk, taken with the three R's and followed with enthusiastic devotion. In Mr. Straker every qualification for seamanship was lacking save enthusiasm, but as he himself never discovered this fact, his *amour propre* did not suffer, and his companions were partly relieved of the burden of his entertainment. Presently he made up his mind that it was time for him to see Jimmy. His nose, trained for scenting news, led him inevitably to the chief actor in the unusual drama which had indirectly involved his own fortunes, and he saw no reason why he should not follow it at once.

"You'd better wait a while," cautioned Doctor Thayer. "That young man pumped his heart dry as a seed-pod, and got some fever germs on top of that. He isn't fit to stand the third degree just yet."

"I'm not going to give him any third degree, not a bit of it. 'Hero! Saved a Princess!' and all

that. That's what's coming to him as soon as the newspapers get hold of it. But I want to know how he did it, and what he did it for. Tell him to buck up."

Jimmy did buck up, though Mr. Straker's message still remains to be delivered. He gathered his forces and exhibited such recuperative abilities as to astonish the old red house and all Ilion. Doctor Thayer and each of his nurses in turn unconsciously assumed credit for the good work, and Sallie Kingsbury took a good share of pride in his satisfactory recovery.

"Two aigs regular," she would say, with all a housekeeper's glory in her guests' enjoyment of food.

There was enough credit to go round, indeed, and Jimmy presently became the animated and interesting center of the family. He might have been a new baby and his bedroom the sacred nursery. He was being spoiled every hour of the day.

"Did he have a good night?" Agatha would anxiously inquire of Mr. Hand.

"Can't tell which is night; he sleeps all the time," would be the tenor of Mr. Hand's reply. Or Sallie would ask, as if her fate depended on the answer, "Did he eat that nice piece er chicken, Aunt Susan?" And Mrs. Stoddard would say, "Eat it! It disappeared so quick I thought he'd choke. Wanted three more just like it, but I told him that invalids were like puppy-dogs—could only have one meal a day."

"Well, how'd he take that?" asked the interested Sallie.

"He said if I thought he was an invalid any longer I had another guess coming. Says he'll be up and into his clothes by to-morrow, and is going to *take care of me*. Says I'm pale and need a highball, whatever that is."

"Never heard of it," said Sallie.

"He's a good young man, if he did get pitched overboard," went on Mrs. Stoddard. "But he doesn't need me any more, and I guess I'll be going along home."

"I don't know but what the rest of us need you," complained Sallie. "It's more of a Sunday-school picnic here than you'd think, what with a New York press agent and a princess, to say nothing of that Mr. Hand."

"He certainly knows how to manage a sick man," said Susan.

"He don't talk like a Christian," said Sallie.

Mrs. Stoddard made her way to Agatha in the cool chamber at the head of the stairs. Agatha, in a dressing-sack, with her hair down, called her in and sent Lizzie away.

"You're not going, are you, Mrs. Stoddard?" She took Susan's two hands and held them lovingly against her cheek. "It won't seem right here, without you."

"You've done your duty, Agatha, and I've done mine, as I saw it. I'm not needed here any more, but I'll send Angie over to help Sallie with the work, after I get the crab-apples picked."

Agatha held Mrs. Stoddard's hands closely. "Ah, you have been good to us!"

"There is none good but One," quoted Mrs. Stoddard; nevertheless her eyes were moist with feeling. "You'll stay on in the old red house?"

"I don't know; probably not for long. But I almost wish I could."

"I've learned a sight by you, Agatha. I want you to know that," said Susan, struggling with her reticence and her impulse toward confession.

"Oh, don't say that to me, Mrs. Stoddard. I can only remember how good you've been to us all."

But Susan would not be denied. "I thought you were proud and vain and—and worldly, Agatha. And I treated you harsh, I know."

"No, no. Whatever you thought, it's all past now, and you are my friend. You'll help me to take care of this dear old place—yes?"

"The Lord will establish the work of your hands, my child!" She suddenly turned with one of her practical ideas. "I wouldn't let that new city man in to see Mr. Hambleton just yet, if I were you."

"Is Mr. Straker trying to get in to see Mr. Hambleton?"

"Knocked at the door twice this morning, and I told him he couldn't come in. 'Why not?' said he. 'Danger of fever,' said I. Then Mr. Hambleton asked me who was there, and I said, 'I don't exactly know, but it's either Miss Redmond's maid's beau or a press agent,' and then Mr.

Hambleton called out, as quick and strong as anybody, 'Go 'way! I think I've got smallpox.' And he went off, quicker'n a wink, and hasn't been back since." Mrs. Stoddard's grim old face wrinkled in a humorous smile. "I guess he'll get over his smallpox scare, but Mr. Hambleton don't want to see him, not yet. He wants to see you."

"I'm going in to see him soon, anyway," said Agatha.

But still she waited a little before going in for her morning visit with James. It meant so much to her! It wasn't to be taken lightly and casually, but with a little pomp and ceremony. Each day since the night of the crisis she had paid her morning call, and each day she had seen new lights in Jimmy's eyes. In vain had she been matter-of-fact and practical, treating him as an invalid whose vagaries should be indulged even though they were of no importance. He would not accept her on those terms. Back of his weakness had been a strength, more and more perceptible each day, touching her with the sweetest flattery woman ever receives. It was the strength of a lover's spirit, looking out at her from his eyes and speaking to her in every inflection of his voice. Moreover, while he stoutly and continuously denied his fever-sickness, he took no trouble to conceal this other malady. As soon as he could speak distinctly he proclaimed his spiritual madness, though nobody but Agatha, and possibly Mrs. Stoddard, quite understood.

"I'm not sick; don't be an idiot, Hand. And give me a shave, for Heaven's sake. Anybody can get knocked on the head—that's all the matter with me. Give me some clothes and you'll see." Even Hand had to give in quickly. Jimmy's resilience passed all expectations. He came up like a rubber ball; and now, on a fine September morning, he was getting shaved and clothed in one of Aleck's suits. Finally he was propped up in an easy chair by a window overlooking the towering elm tree and the white church.

"Er—Andy—couldn't you get me some kind of a tie? This soft shirt business doesn't look very fit, does it, without a tie?" coaxed Jim.

"If you ask me, I say you look fine."

"Where'd you get all your good clothes, I'd like to know?" inquired Jim sternly, looking at Hand's immaculate linen.

"Miss Sallie washes 'em after I go to bed in the morning," confessed Hand.

"Oh, she does, does she!" jeered Jimmy. "Well, you'll have to go to bed at night, like other folks, now. And then what'll you do?"

"I guess Miss Sallie'll have to sit up nights," modestly suggested Hand, when a slipper struck him in the back. "Good shot! What d'you want now—an opera hat?" he inquired derisively.

"Andy!" ejaculated Jim, dismay settling on his features. "I've just thought! Do you s'pose I'm paying hotel bills all this time at The Larue?"

Hand grinned unsympathetically. "If you engaged a room, sir, and didn't give it up, I believe it's the custom—"

"That'll do for now, Handy Andy, if you can't get up any better answer than that. Lord, what's that!" Jim suddenly exclaimed, as if he hadn't been waiting, all ears, for that very step in the passage.

"I guess likely that'll be Miss Redmond," replied the respectful Hand. And so it was.

Agatha, fresh as the morning, stood in the doorway for a contemplative moment, before coming forward to take Jim's outstretched hand.

"Samson—shorn!" she exclaimed gaily. "I hardly know you, all fixed up like this."

"Oh, I look much better than this when I'm really dressed up, you know," Jim asserted. Agatha patted his knuckles indulgently, looked at the thinness and whiteness of the hand, and shook her head.

"Not gaining enough yet," she said. "That isn't the right color for a hand."

"It needs to be held longer."

"Oh, no, it needs more quiet. Fewer visitors, no talking, and plenty of fresh milk and eggs."

Jimmy almost stamped his foot. "Down with eggs!" he cried. "And milk, too. I'm going to institute a mutiny. Excuse me, I know I'm visiting and ought to be polite, but no more invalid's food for me. Handy Andy and I are going out to kill a moose and eat it—eh, Andy?"

But Hand was gone. Agatha sat down in a big rocker at the other window. "In that case," she said demurely, "we'll all have to be thinking of Lynn and New York and work."

Jim shamelessly turned feather. "Oh, no," he cried. "I'm very ill. I'm not able to go to Lynn. Besides, my time isn't up yet. This is my vacation."

He looked up smiling into Agatha's face, ingenuous as a boy of seven.

"Do you always take such—such venturesome holidays?" she asked.

"I never took any before; at least, not what I call holidays," he said. "If you don't come over here and sit near me, I shall get up and go over to you. And Andy says I'm very wobbly on my legs. I might by accident drop into your lap."

Agatha pushed her chair over toward James, and before she could sit down he had drawn it still closer to his own. "The doctor says my hand has to be held!" he assured her, as he got firm hold of hers.

"For shame!" she cried. "Mustn't tell fibs."

"Tell me," he begged, "is this your house, really'n truly?" It brought, as he knew it would, her ready smile.

"Yep," she nodded.

"And is that your tree out there?"

"Yep."

"Ah!" he sighed. "It's great! It's Paradise. I've dreamed of just such a heavenly place. And Andy says we've been here two weeks."

"Yes—and a little more."

"My holiday half gone!" His mood suddenly changed from its jocund and boyish manner, and he turned earnestly toward Agatha.

"I don't know, dear girl, all that has happened since that night—with you—on the water. Hand shuts me off most villainously. But I know it's Heaven being here, with Aleck and every one so good to me, and you! You've come back, somehow, like a reality from my dreams. I watch for you. You're all I think of, whether I'm awake or asleep."

Agatha earnestly regarded his frank face, with its laughing, true eyes. "Jimmy," she said—he had begged her to call him that—"it seems as if I, too, had known you a long time. More than these little two weeks."

"It is more; you said so," put in Jim.

"Yes; a little more. And if it hadn't been for you, I shouldn't be here, or anywhere. I often think of that."

"You see!" he cried. "I had to have you, even if I followed you half-way round the globe; even if I had to jump into the sea. Kismet—you can't escape me!"

But Agatha was only half smiling. "No," she protested, "it is not that. I owe—"

Jim put his fingers on her lips. "Tut, tut! Dear girl, you owe nothing, except to your own courage and good swimming. But as for me, why, you know I'm yours."

"James," Agatha could not help preaching a bit, "just because we happen to be the actors in an adventure is no reason, no real reason, why we should be silly about each other. We don't have to end the story that way."

"Oh, don't we! We'll see!" shouted Jim. "And I'm not silly, if some other people are. I don't see why I should be cheated out of a perfectly good climax, if you put it that way, any more than the next fellow. Agatha, dearest—"

But she wouldn't listen to him. "No, no," she protested, slowly but earnestly. "Look here, Mr. James Hambleton, of Lynn! I promise to do anything, or everything, that you honestly want, after you get well. I'll listen to you then. But I'm not going to let a man who is just out of a delirium make love to me."

"But I'm not just out. I only had a whack on the head, and that's nothing. I'm strong as an ox. I'm saner than anybody. Do listen to me, Agatha."

"No—no, I mustn't."

"But tell me, dear. You're free? You're not—" he searched for the word that suited his mood —"you're not plighted?"

She smiled. "No, I'm not plighted."

"Ah!" he chortled, and seized both her hands, putting them to his lips. She stood over him, looking down tenderly.

She stood over him looking down tenderly.

[Illustration: She stood over him, looking down tenderly.]

"Time for your broth, Mr. Hambleton, and Mr. Straker wants to know if he can see you," interrupted Mr. Hand.

"Can't see him, Andy. I'm very busy," began Jim; then added, "By the way, who is Mr. Straker?"

"Tell him he may come in for a few minutes, Mr. Hand," directed Agatha. Presently the manager was being introduced in the properest manner to the invalid. Agatha, knowing James would need protection from quizzing, stayed by.

"Now, tell me," wheedled Mr. Straker, "the whole story just exactly as it happened to you, please. It's very important that I should know all the details."

So Jimmy, aided now and then by Agatha, delivered a Straker-ized version of the wreck and the arrival at Ilion.

"But before that," questioned the manager. "How did you happen to be on the *Jeanne D'Arc*?"

For the first time James hesitated. Not even Agatha knew that part of the story. "I was picked up by the *Jeanne D'Arc* in New York harbor," he replied slowly.

Mr. Straker frowned. "How—picked up?"

"Out of the water."

"What were you in the water for?"

"I had just dropped off a tug."

"What for?"

"Because I wanted the yacht to pick me up."

At this point Mr. Straker directed a commiserating look at Agatha. It said "Crazy" as plain as words.

"What were you on the tug for?"

"I had followed the yacht."

"What for?"

The pause before James's next answer was apparent. When it came, there came with it that

same seven-year-old look of smiling ingenuousness. "I just wanted to see what they were going to do with Miss Redmond."

"Jimminy Christmas!" exploded Mr. Straker. "Any more kinks in this story? How'd you know they'd stolen Miss Redmond?"

And so Jimmy had to tell it all, with the abominable Straker growing more and more excited every minute, and Agatha standing mute and awe-struck, looking at him. It was plain that Jimmy, for the moment, had the upper hand. "And that's about all!" he laughed.

"What on earth, man, is the matter with you?" fumed Straker. "Didn't you know there were a hundred chances to one the yacht wouldn't pick you up?"

Jimmy nodded, unabashed. "One chance is good enough for me. Nothing can kill me this trip, I tell you. I'm good for anything. Lucky star's over me. I knew it all the time."

Straker turned a disgusted face toward Agatha. "He's crazy as a loon! Isn't he?" he questioned glumly. But Jimmy knew his man.

"No, not crazy, Mr. Straker. Only a touch o' sun! And it's glorious, isn't it, Miss Redmond?"

She loved him for his boyish laughter, for the rollicking spirit in his voice, but her eyes suddenly filled as she pondered the meaning back of his extraordinary story. With Mr. Straker gone at last, it was she who came to Jim with outstretched hands.

"You mean you heard me call for help, there on the hill?"

"Yep," he answered, suddenly sheepish.

"And you followed to rescue me if you could?"

"Yep—of course."

"Ah, James! Why did you do it?"

Jim's small-boy expression beamed from his eyes. "I followed the Voice and the Face—as I told you once before. Don't you remember?"

"I remember. But why?"

His seven-year-old mood was suddenly touched with poetic dignity. "I could naught else," he said, looking into her face. It was all tenderness; and she did not resist when he drew her gently down, till her lips touched his.

CHAPTER XXII

A MAN OF NO PRINCIPLE

Monsieur Chatelard's disappearance was as complete as though he had dropped off the earth. The sheriff, with his warrant in his pocket, hid his chagrin behind the sugar and flour barrels whose sale occupied his time when he wasn't losing malefactors. Chamberlain, having once freed his mind to the grave-like Hand, maintained absolute silence on the subject, so far as the audience at the old red house was concerned. But he went into consultation with Aleck, and together they laid a network of police inspection about Ilion and Charlesport.

"It won't do any good," grumbled Chamberlain. "We'll have to catch him and choke him with our own hands, if it ever gets done."

Nevertheless, they left nothing to chance. Telegraph and telephone were brought into requisition, and within twenty-four hours after the disappearance every station on the railroad, as well as every village along the coast, was warned to arrest the fugitive if he came that way. Mr. Chamberlain took the white motor and went off on long, mysterious journeys, coming back only to go into secret conclave with Aleck, or mysteriously to rush off again.

Aleck Van Camp stayed at home, keeping a dog-watch on Mélanie and Madame Reynier, whether they were at the Hillside or at the old red house. Now that the purposes of the Frenchman had been made clear, and since he was still at large, the world was no safe place for unattended women. Aleck pondered deeply over the situation.

"Is your amiable cousin's henchman a man to be scared off by our recent little encounter, do you think?" he asked of Mélanie.

She considered. "He might be scared, easily enough. But I know well that he has a contempt for the usual machinery of the law. He has evaded it so many times that he thinks it an easy matter."

Aleck smiled whimsically. "I don't wonder at that, if he has had many experiences like the last."

"He boasts that he can bribe anybody."

"Ah, so! But how much rope would the duke give him, do you think, on a pinch?"

"All the rope he cares to take. Stephen's protection is all-powerful in Krolvetz; and elsewhere Chatelard depends, as I have said, on his wits."

"But there must be some limit to the duke's stretch of conscience!"

Mélanie's eyes took on their far-away look. "Perhaps there is," she said at last, "but who can guess where that limit is? Besides, all he asks of his henchmen is results. He never inquires as to methods."

"Well, what do you think is the exact result Duke Stephen wants, in this case?"

"He wants me either to return to Krolvetz and marry his brother, or—"

Mélanie's hesitation was prolonged.

"Or—what?'

"Or to disappear so completely that there will be no question of my return. You see, it's a peculiar case. If I marry without his consent—"

"Which you are about to do—" cut in Aleck.

"I simply forfeit my estates and they go into the public treasury, where they will be strictly accounted for. But if I marry Lorenzo—"

"Which is impossible—"

"Then the money goes into the family, of course, as my dot. Or—or, if I should die—in that case Stephen inherits the money. And there is no doubt but that Stephen needs money."

Aleck pondered for several minutes, while grave shadows threatened his face. But presently his smiling, unquenchable good temper came to the surface, and he gleefully tucked Mélanie's hand under his arm.

"As I said before, you need a husband very badly."

"Oh, I don't know," she laughed.

The result of Aleck's moment of grave thought came a few days later, with the arrival of two quietly-dressed, unostentatious men. He told Mélanie that one man was her chauffeur for the white machine, and the other was an extra hand he had engaged for the return trip on the *Sea Gull*. The chauffeur, however, for one reason or another, rarely took the wheel, and could have been seen walking at a distance behind Mélanie whenever she stirred abroad. The extra hand for the *Sea Gull* did just the same as the chauffeur.

From the day of the arrival of the manager, Mr. Hand's rather mysterious but friendly temper underwent a change for the worse. He not only continued silent, which might easily be counted a virtue, but he became almost sulky, which could only be called a crime. There was no bantering with Sallie in the kitchen, scarcely a friendly smile for Agatha herself. Mr. Hand was markedly out of sorts.

On the morning following Mr. Straker's request that Hand should repair the car, the manager found him tinkering in the carriage shed near the church. The car was jacked up on a horse-block, while one wheel lay near the road. Mr. Hand was as grimy and oily as the law allows, working over the machinery with a sort of vicious earnestness. Mr. Straker hovered around for a few moments, then addressed Hand in that tone of pseudo-geniality that marks a certain type of politician.

"Look here, Colonel, I understand you were in the employ of that French anarchist."

It was an unlucky moment for attack, though Mr. Straker did not at once perceive it. Hand carefully wiped the oil from a neat ring of metal, slid down on his back under the car and screwed on a nut. As Mr. Straker, hands in pockets and feet wide apart, watched the mechanician, there came through the silence and the sweet air the sound of thrushes calling from the wood beyond. Mr. Straker craned his head to look out at the church, then at the low stone wall, as if he expected to see the songsters performing on a stage before a row of footlights. He turned back to Mr. Hand.

"That's right, is it? You worked for the slippery Mounseer?"

"Uh-m," Hand grumbled, with a screw in his mouth. "Something like that."

"What'd you do?"

"I've found where she was wrenched in the turn-over. Got to have a new pin for this off wheel before she goes much farther."

"All right, I'll order one by telegraph to-day. What 'd you do, I asked."

Hand wriggled himself out from under the car and got on his feet. He thrust his grimy hands deep into his pockets, stood for a moment contemplative and belligerent, as if undecided whether to explode or not, and then silently walked away.

As Mr. Straker watched his figure moving slowly toward the kitchen, he started a long low whistle, expressive of suspicion and doubt. Midway, however, he changed to a lively tune whose title was "I've got him on the run"—a classic just then spreading up and down Broadway. He took a few turns about the car, looked at the gearing with a knowing air, and then went into the house.

If he had been a small boy, his mother would have punished him for stamping through the halls; being a grown man and a visitor, he may be described as walking with firm, bold tread. Finally he was able to run down Agatha, who was conferring with Sallie in the library.

Sallie sniffed in scorn of Mr. Straker, whom she disliked far worse than Mr. Hand; nevertheless, as she left the room she twisted up her gingham apron and tucked it into its band in a vague attempt at company manners. Mr. Straker lost no time in attacking Agatha.

"What d'you know about that chauffeur-nurse and general roustabout that's taking care of your young gentleman up-stairs?" he inquired bluntly.

Innocent of subtlety as Mr. Straker was, he was nevertheless keen enough to see that Agatha's instincts took alarm at his words. Indeed, one skilled in reading her face could have detected the nature of the uneasiness written there. She could not lie again, as she had unhesitatingly lied to the sheriff; neither could she abandon her position as protector to Mr. Hand. She wished for cleverness of the sort that could throw her manager off the scent, but saw no way other than the direct way.

"Nothing—I know almost nothing about him."

"Comes from N'York?"

"I fancy so."

"Well, take it from me, the sooner you get rid of him the better. Chances are he's a man of no principle, and he'll do you."

Agatha was silent. Meantime Mr. Straker got his second wind.

"Of course he knows what he's about when it comes to a machine," the manager continued, "but mark me, he knows too much for an honest man. Looks to me as if there wasn't anything on this green earth he can't do."

"Green ocean, too—he's quite as much at home there," laughed Agatha.

"Humph!" Mr. Straker grunted in disgust. "Let me assure you, Miss Redmond, that it's no joking matter."

Tradition to the contrary, Agatha was content to let the man have the last word. Mr. Straker turned to some business matters, wrote out telegraphic material enough to occupy the leisurely Charlesport operator for some hours, and then disappeared.

Agatha was impressed by the manager's words somewhat more than her manner implied. She had no swift and sure judgment of people, and her experience of the world, short as it was, had taught her that recklessness is a costly luxury. She was meditating as to the wisest course to pursue, when the ex-chauffeur appeared.

Hand wore his accustomed loose shirt and trousers without coat or waistcoat, and it seemed as if he had never known a hat. His thick hair was tumbled back from the forehead. His hands were now spotless, and his whole appearance agreeably clean and wholesome. He even looked as if he were going to be frank, but Agatha knew that must be a delusion. It was impossible, however, not to be somewhat cajoled—he was so eminently likable. Agatha took a lesson from his own book, and waited in silence for him to speak.

"Mademoiselle?" His voice had an undertone of excitement or nervousness that was wholly new.

"Well, Mr. Hand?"

He remained standing by the door for a moment, then stepped forward with the abrupt manner of a stripling who, usually inarticulate, has suddenly found tongue.

"Why did you do it, Mademoiselle?"

"Do what, my friend?"

"Back me up before the sheriff. Give me a slick walkout like that."

Agatha laughed good-humoredly.

"Why should I answer your questions, Mr. Hand, when you so persistently ignore mine?"

Hand made a gesture of impatience.

"Mademoiselle, you may think me all kinds of a scamp, but I'm not idiot enough to hide behind a woman. Don't you know me well enough to know that?" he demanded so earnestly that he seemed very cross.

Agatha looked into his face with a new curiosity. He was very young, after all. Something in the way of experience had been grinding philosophy, of a sort, into him—or out of him. Wealth and position had been his natural enemies, and he had somehow been led to an attitude of antagonism that was, at bottom, quite foreign to his nature.

So much Agatha could guess at, and for the rest, instinct taught her to be kind. But she was not willing now to take him quite so seriously as he seemed to be taking himself. She couldn't resist teasing him a bit, by saying, "Nevertheless, Mr. Hand, you did hide behind me; you had to."

He did not reply to her bantering smile, but, in the pause that followed, stepped to the bookcase where she had been standing, gingerly picked up a soft bit of linen and lace from the floor and dropped it into her lap. Then he faced her in an attitude of pugnacious irritation. For a brief moment his silence fell from him.

"I didn't have to," he contradicted. "I let it go because I thought you were a good sport, and you wouldn't catch me backing out of your game, not by a good deal! But there's a darned sight,—pardon me, Mademoiselle!—there's too much company round here to suit me! *You* know me, *you* know you can trust me, Mademoiselle! But what about Tom, Dick and Harry all over this place—casting eyes at a man?"

Agatha, almost against her will, was forced to meet his seriousness half-way. "I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Tell 'em!" he burst out. "Tell 'em the whole story. Tell that blamed snoopin' manager that I'm a crook and a kidnapper, and then he'll stop nosing round after me. I'll have an hour's start, and that's all I want. Dogging a man—running him down under his own automobile!" Hand permitted himself a dry smile at his own joke, but immediately added, "It goes against the grain, Mademoiselle!"

Agatha's face brightened, as she grasped the clue to Hand's wrath. "I've no doubt," she answered gravely. She knew the manager. "But why should I tell him, as you suggest?"

"Why?" Hand stopped a moment, as if baffled at the difficulty of putting such obvious philosophy into words. "Why? Because that's the way people are—never satisfied till they uncover and root up every blamed thing in a man's life. Yes, Mademoiselle, you know it's true. They'll always be uneasy with me around."

Agatha was aware that when a man utters what he considers to be a general truth, it is useless to enter the field of argument.

"Suppose you do have 'an hour's start,' as you express it. Where would you go?"

"Oh, I'll look about for a while. After that I'm going to Mr. Hambleton in Lynn. He's going to have a new car."

"Ah!" Agatha suddenly saw light. "Then there's only one thing. Mr. Hambleton must know the truth. It can concern no one else. Will you tell him?"

Mr. Hand produced his dry smile. "Nobody has to tell Mr. Hambleton anything. He looked straight into my face that day on the hill, as we were leaving the park."

"And he remembers?"

Something strange in Hand's expression arrested Agatha's attention, long before he found tongue to answer. It was a look of happiness and pride, as if he owned a treasure. "He remembers very well, Mademoiselle."

"And what—?"

"You can't help but be square with him, Mademoiselle. But as for these gentlemen of style—"

Hand paused in his oratory, his slow anger again burning on the surface. Before Agatha knew what he was about, he had picked up the handkerchief from her lap between thumb and forefinger, and was holding it at arm's length.

"You can't squeeze a man's history out of him, as you squeeze water out of a handkerchief, Mademoiselle," he flared out. "And you can't drop him and pick him up again, nor throw him down. You can't do that with a man, Mademoiselle!"

He tossed the flimsy linen back into her lap. "And I don't want any dealings with your Strakers—nor gentlemen of that stamp."

"Nor Chatelards?"

"He's slick—slick as they make 'em. But he isn't an inquisitive meddler."

Agatha laughed outright; and somehow, by the blessed alchemy of amusement, the air was cleared and Mr. Hand's trouble faded out of importance. But Agatha could not let him go without one further word. She met his gaze with a straightforward look, as she asked: "Tell me, have I failed to treat you as a friend, Mr. Hand?"

"Ah, Mademoiselle!" he cried; and there was a touch of shame and compunction in his voice. As he stood before Agatha, she was reminded of his shamed and cowed appearance in the cove, on the day of their rescue, when he had waited for her anger to fall on him. She saw that he had gained something, some intangible bit of manliness and dignity, won during these weeks of service in her house. And she guessed rightly that it was due to the man whom he had so ungrudgingly nursed.

"I'm glad you are going to Lynn, to be with Mr. Hambleton," she said at last. "As long as he is your friend, I shall be your friend, too, and never uneasy. You may count on that. And now will you do me another kindness?"

"I'll put that old racing-car in order, if that's what you mean. Of course."

"As soon as possible. But it would seem that from now on you are accountable to no one but Mr. Hambleton."

"I'm his man," said Mr. Hand simply. "I'd do anything for him." He turned away with his old-time puzzling manner, half deferential, half indifferent.

And so Mr. Straker was ready to depart for New York at last, leaving Agatha, much against his will, to "complete her recovery" at Ilion. At least, that was the way he felt in duty bound to put it.

"You have found a substitute now," Agatha urged. "It is only fair to let her have a chance. A week, more or less, can not make any difference, now that I've broken so many engagements already. I'll come back later and make a fresh start."

"You stay up here and New York'll forget you're living!" growled Mr. Straker.

"Not if you continue to be my manager," said Agatha.

"If I'm to be your manager, I ought never to let you out of my sight for a minute. It's too dangerous."

CHAPTER XXIII

JIMMY MUFFS THE BALL

It will sometimes happen that young gentlemen, skipping confident, even under their lucky star, will get a fall. Fortune had been too constant to Jimmy not to be ready to turn her fickle face away the moment he wasn't looking. But such is the rashness born of success and a bounding heart, that young blood leaps to its doom, smiling, as it were, on the faithless lady's back.

Jimmy had no forebodings, but rioted gorgeously in returning health, in a whole pack of new emotions, and in what he supposed to be his lady's favor. Aleck, more philosophical, took his happiness with a more quiet gusto, not provoking the frown of the gods. But for Jim the day of reckoning was coming.

One day Aleck joined him, walking up and down the porch. Jim was in one of his boyish, cocksure moods.

"I know what you're going to say," he began, before Aleck could spring his news. "You're going to marry the princess."

"Just so," said Aleck. "How'd you know? Clairvoyance?"

"Nope."

"Well, you needn't look so high and mighty about it, old man. Why don't you do the same thing yourself? Then we'll have a double wedding."

"I've thought of that," said Jim.

As the two men talked, Agatha and Mélanie, both dressed in white, strolled side by side down the garden path toward the wall. They were deep in conversation, their backs turned toward the veranda.

"I don't see that they look so much alike," announced Jim, who had but recently learned all the causes and effects of the Chatelard business. Aleck's eyes gleamed.

"Which one, as they stand there now, do you take to be Miss Redmond?" he asked.

"One on the left," answered Jim promptly.

Aleck gave a signaling whistle which caused both the women quickly to turn. Agatha was on the right.

Aleck grinned broadly. "So that Yahoo of a Frenchman wasn't so stupid after all."

"I'd like to get my hands on him!" muttered Jim.

"Frenchman or not, there's going to be a wedding right here in the old red house on Wednesday," said Aleck.

"Hoopla! I knew that was it!"

"And then Mélanie and I are going to cruise back to New York. Awfully sorry—but you're not invited."

"You couldn't get me aboard any gilt-edged yacht that floats!"

At Jimmy's words—wholly untrue, by the way—Aleck's happy mood suddenly dimmed, as he thought of the dangers and anxieties of the past month. He turned and laid an arm, boy-fashion, over Jim's shoulder, pulling his hair as his hand went by.

"You're a fool of a kid!" he said, choking.

When Jim looked into his cousin's face, he knew. "Oh, I say, old man, it wasn't so bad as all that."

Aleck stiffened up. "Who said anything about its being bad? You'd better get some togs to wear at the wedding. I'm going to need these clothes myself."

It turned out, actually enough, that the wedding was to come off on a certain Wednesday in September.

"Would you like New York and a bishop and a big church better than the old red house and the Charlesport minister?" Aleck anxiously asked of Mélanie.

"Oh, no," she protested; and Aleck knew she was sincere. So they prepared to terminate their holidays by celebrating the wedding in the pine grove. Mélanie spent the intervening days happily with Agatha, or walking with Aleck, or with the delightful group that foregathered in Parson Thayer's library. Jimmy made extravagant and highly colored verses to the bride-to-be, to Sallie Kingsbury, and even to himself. His feet were often lame, but he solemnly assured the company that it was entirely due to circumstances over which he had no control. A wedding was a wedding, said he, and should have its bard; also its dancers and its minstrels.

"We'll have all our friends in Ilion, anyway," said Aleck. They counted up the list. Besides the occupants of the house and those from the Hillside, there would be Doctor Thayer, Susan Stoddard and Angie, Big and Little Simon, and the lawyer.

"And they're all going to dance with the bride," announced Jim. "After me. I'm first choice."

"A dance led, so to speak, by the elusive Monsieur Chatelard?"

The name alone made Jimmy wroth. "It's a dance for which he will pay the fiddler yet!" he prophesied.

"Oh, he's gone this time. Scared out of the country for keeps!" was Aleck's expressed opinion. But that it might or might not be so, was what they all secretly thought.

The day before the wedding was a jewel of a day, such as New England at her best can fling into the lap of early autumn. A wind from the sea, flocks of white cloud scudding across the sapphire sky, and a sun all kindness—such was the day. It was never a "weather breeder" either; but steady, promising good for the morrow.

Many times during the week James and Chamberlain and Agatha had their heads together, planning surprises for the bridal pair. The result was that on Tuesday Jim and Chamberlain borrowed the white motor-car, loaded it down with a large variety of junk, such as food from Sallie's kitchen, flowers and so on, and started for Charlesport. They ran down to the wharf, transferred their loot to the rowboat, and pulled out to the *Sea Gull*, swinging at her mooring in deep water.

A half-hour of work, and the yacht was dressed for festival. There were strings of flags to stretch from bow to masthead and to stern; pennants for topmasts; the Stars and Stripes in beautiful silk for a standard, and a gorgeous banner with an embroidered A and M intertwined, for special occasions. Flowers were placed in the cabins, and food in the lockers. The seamen had been aboard, made the yacht clean and shipshape as a war vessel on parade, and had got permission to leave for their last night ashore. Everything was in readiness, even to the laying of the fire in the engine hold.

The bride and groom were to come aboard the next day about noon, and cruise down the coast leisurely, as weather permitted. Hand, in charge of the white motor-car, with Madame Reynier, Chamberlain, Agatha and Jimmy, were to start for New York, touring as long as their inclination lasted. The sophisticated Lizzie was to travel to what was, for her, the center of the universe, by the fastest Pullman.

Jimmy and Chamberlain, on the way home from their visit to the *Sea Gull*, came very near being confidential.

"I want to say, Mr. Hambleton, that I shall never forgive myself for bungling about that Chatelard business."

"As I understand the matter, it wasn't your bungling, but the sheriff's."

"It's all the same," conceded Mr. Chamberlain mournfully. "And in my opinion, the Frenchman's not done with his tricks yet. He's a dangerous character, Mr. Hambleton."

Jim laughed, remembering certain incidents on the *Jeanne D'Arc*.

"Do you know," Chamberlain continued, "I'm convinced the bloomin' beggar is hiding about here somewhere. I'm glad Aleck is getting away."

"I thought the evidence favored the theory that Chatelard had made straight for New York."

"Not a bit of it. Aleck and I let you all believe that, for the sake of the ladies. But the evidence is all the other way. We would surely have caught him if he had been on any of the New York trains. I believe he's about here and means mischief yet."

"If he's about here, there's no doubt about the mischief."

"I'm going down to-night to bunk on the *Sea Gull*. Aleck let the men off, to go to a sailor's dance over on one of the islands. They'll probably be at it all night, so I'm going back."

"Why not let me go? I'm fine as a fiddle. You've had your full share of nasty detective work."

"Not at all. I'm booked to see this thing through."

"All right!" laughed Jimsy. "But if you change your mind, let me know."

Arriving at the house, the men found it deserted. Windows were open and doors unlatched, but no one, not even Danny, responded to Jim's call. Chamberlain started for the Hillside in the car, and Jim wandered about lonesomely, wondering where everybody was. With Jim, as in most cases, everybody meant one person; and presently Sallie, appearing slowly from the upper regions, gave him his clue. He started nimbly for the pine wood.

The wagon road stretched alluringly into the sunflecked shade of the grove. A hush like that of primeval day threw its uncanny influence over the world. Jim felt something tugging at his spirit that was unfamiliar, disquieting. He began to whistle just for company, and in a moment, as if at a signal call, Danny came along the path, sedately trotting to meet him.

"Hullo, old pardner! So this is where you are."

Danny said yes, and led Jim into the clearing and up to a pine stump, where everybody sat, quite alone, chin propped on hand. No singing, no book, and—or did Jimmy imagine it?—a spirit decidedly quenched. Her eyelids were red and her face was pale.

"So, dear lady, I have found you. But I was listening for the song."

"There is no song to-day." Agatha's manner resembled an Arctic breeze.

"May one ask why?"

"One can not always be singing."

"No? Why not? I could—*if* I could."

Agatha was obliged to relax a trifle at Jimmy's foolishness, but only to reveal, more and more distinctly, a wretchedness of spirit that was quite baffling. It was not feminine wretchedness waiting for a masculine comforter, either, as James observed with regret; it was a stoical spirit, braced to meet a blow—or to deal one.

Jimmy was not used to being snubbed, and instinctively prepared for vigorous protest. He began with a little preliminary diplomacy.

"You haven't inquired what I'm going to do with the remainder of my holiday," he remarked.

"I supposed you would return soon to Lynn. Shall we walk back to the house?"

The unkind words were spoken in a rare-sweet voice, courteously enough. Jim looked at the speaker a moment, then emphatically said "No!"

"It is quite time I was returning."

"Have you anything there to do that is more important than listening to me for fifteen minutes?"

Agatha did not pretend not to understand him. She turned toward him with unflinching eyes.

"Truth to say, yes, Mr. Hambleton, I have. I don't wish to listen to—anything."

"Oh—if you feel like that! Your 'Mr. Hambleton' is enough to strike me dumb."

"Believe me, it is the best way."

"Again, may one ask why?"

"You are going back to your own people, to your own work. And I to mine."

"But that's the very point. My idea was to—to combine them."

"I guessed it."

Jimmy smiled his ingenuous smile as he suavely asked, "And don't you—er—like the idea?"

Agatha turned her wretched white face toward him. Into it there had come a grim determination that left Jimmy quite out in the cold.

"I have no choice in liking or disliking it," she said quite evenly. "But there are plenty of reasons why I can't think of it. And you shouldn't think of it any more. I assure you, you are making a mistake."

She got up as if ready to walk away, her face averted.

"Agatha!"

At the name she turned to Jim, as much as to say she would be quite reasonable if he would be. But her face suddenly flushed gloriously.

"Agatha, dear, hear me. I did not intend to tell you all my secret to-day; not until I should be on neutral ground, so to speak. But I can't let you leave me this way."

"You will have to. I am going back to the house."

Up to this point, James had merely been playing tag, as it were. The game wasn't really on. A little skirmishing on either side was in order. But Agatha's last words were the call to action. They roused the ghost of some old Hambleton ancestor who meant not to be beaten. Jim squared himself in the middle of the path, touched Agatha's shoulder with the lightest, most respectful finger, and requested: "But I would ask you, as a special favor, to stay a few minutes longer."

Jim's tone left Agatha no choice. She sat down again on the pine stump, but she could not meet Jimmy's eyes. He stood a few feet away from her. When he spoke, his voice was firm and steady, ringing with earnestness. There was no doubt now but that he was in the game for all he was worth.

"Agatha, you shall not turn me down like this. Wait until you know me better, and know

yourself better. You've had no time to think this matter over, and it involves a good deal, I admit. But we have lived through a good deal together in these few weeks. I'm here; I'm here to stay. You can't say now, dear, that you care nothing for me—can you?"

"You shall not turn me down like this."

[Illustration: "You shall not turn me down like this."]

"What is the use of all this, I ask! You will always be my friend, my rescuer, to whom I am eternally grateful."

Jimmy emitted a sound halfway between "Shucks" and "Damn" and swung impatiently clean round on his heels.

"Grateful be hanged! I don't want anybody to be grateful. I want you to love me—to marry me. Why, Agatha," he argued boyishly, his hopes rising as he saw her face soften a little, "you're mine, for I plucked you out of the sea. I had to have you. I guess I knew it that Sunday, only it was 'way off, somewhere in the back of my brain. You're a dream I've always loved. Just as this old house is. You're the woman I could have prayed for. I'll do, I'll be, anything you wish; I'll change myself over, but oh, don't say you won't have me. Agatha, Agatha, you don't know how much you mean to me!"

Before this speech was finished, James, according to the good old fashion, was down on his knees before his lady, and had imprisoned one of her hands. Stoic she was, not to yield! Her eyes had a suspicious moistness, as she shook her head.

"You will always be the most gallant, unselfish friend I have ever known. But—"

"But—what?"

"Marry you I can not."

"Why not?"

"I can not marry anybody."

Then Jimsy said a disgraceful thing. "You kissed me once. Will you do it again?"

At this impudence, she neither got angry nor changed her mind—a bad sign for Jimmy. She put his hand away, saying, "You must forgive me the kiss."

Jimmy jumped to his feet with another inarticulate sound, every whit as bad as an oath, and stood before her.

"Agatha Redmond, will you marry me?"

"No."

Jim turned in his tracks and left the wood.

Two hours later, at supper, Jim was inquired for.

"Our last supper together, and Mr. Hambleton not here!" mourned Chamberlain.

Agatha felt guilty, but could scarcely confess it. "You are all invited for next year, you know," she said.

"And we're all coming," announced Mélanie. "But poor Mr. Hambleton will miss his supper tonight."

The "poor Mr. Hambleton" struck Agatha. "I think Mr. Hambleton is doing very well indeed. I saw him start off for a walk this afternoon."

"Jim's a chump. Give him a cold potato," jeered Aleck.

But after supper was over, and the twilight deepened into darkness, Agatha sought Aleck where she could speak with him alone.

"I—I think Mr. Hambleton was troubled when he left here this afternoon," she said. "Can you think where he would be likely to go? He is not strong enough to bear much hard exercise yet."

Aleck looked at her keenly.

"If he went anywhere, I think he'd go straight to the yacht."

"I feel a little anxious, someway," confessed Agatha.

Chamberlain's voice broke in upon them. "Anybody ready to take me down to the *Sea Gull* in the car?"

As Aleck started for the machine, the anxiety in Agatha's face perceptibly lightened. "And may I go with you?" she asked eagerly.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER YOU, MONSIEUR?

Jim had no desire to create a sensation among his friends at the old red house; but as he left the pine grove all his instincts led him to flee in another direction. He did not fully realize just what had happened to him, but he was conscious of having received a very hard jolt, indeed. The house, full of happy associations as it was, was just now too tantalizing a place. Aleck had won out, and he and Mélanie were radiating that peculiar kind of lover's joy which shines on the eve of matrimony. Jim wished them well—none better—but he also wished they wouldn't make such a fuss over these things. Get it done and out of the way, and the less said about it the better. In fact, Jim's buoyant and sunny spirit went into eclipse; he lost his holiday ardor, and trudged over the hill and into the shore road in a state of extreme dejection.

But he lingered on the way, diverted almost against his will by the sight of fishing smacks putting into harbor, an island steamer rounding a distant cliff, and the *Sea Gull* lying motionless just within the breakwater. Women may be unkind, but a ship is a ship, after all. One can not nurse the pain even of a shattered heart when running before a stiff wind with the spinnaker set and an open sea ahead.

The thought decided him. The sea should be his bride. Jim did not stop to arrange, at the moment, just how this should be brought about, but his determination was none the less firm. He became sentimental to the extent of reflecting, vaguely, that this was but philosophic justice. The sea had not conquered him—far from it; neither should She conquer him. He would follow the sea, the path of glamour, the home of the winged foot and the vanishing sail, the road to alien and mysterious lands—

Thus Jimmy, in reaction from the Arctic douche to which his emotional self had been subjected. He was, figuratively speaking, blue with the cold, but trying valiantly to warm himself.

As he gazed at the *Sea Gull*, asleep on the flood tide, cutting a gallant figure in the glowing sunset, he felt an overmastering longing to be aboard. He would stay on the yacht until Chamberlain came, at least; possibly all night.

Having made up his mind on this point, James persuaded himself that he felt better. Philosophy is a friend in need, after all. Why should one failure in getting one's desires crush the spirit? He would make a right-about-face, travel for a year on a sailing vessel, see the world. That was it. Hang the shoe business!

Immersed in mental chaos such as these fragments of thought suggest, Jim did not perceive that he was being overtaken, until a slow greeting came to his ears.

"Good evening, friend." It was the deliberate, wide-eyed youth of the Reading-room.

"Ah, good evening."

"If you are on your way to the Sailors' Reading-room, I wish to inform you that I have been obliged to lock up for to-night, on account of an urgent errand at the village." Jimmy stared vacantly for a moment at the pale, washed-out countenance of his interlocutor. "I thought I'd tell you," the youth went on in his copy-book style, "so as to save your taking the long walk. I am the librarian of the Reading-room."

"Ah, thank you. But I wasn't going to the Reading-room to-night. I am on my way to the village."

"Well, there's a large majority of people do go to the Reading-room, first and last," the youth explained with pride. "And some of them are not worthy of its privileges. I am on my way now to prevent what may be a frightful accident to one who has enjoyed the benefits of our work."

Jim gazed at the youth. "A frightful accident! Then why in Heaven's name don't you hurry?"

The youth exhibited a slightly injured air, but did not hasten.

"I was just about to continue on my way," he said, "when it occurred to me that you might be interested to know."

"That's good of you. But what is it all about?"

"Some time ago, a very profane and impatient gentleman, waiting for money to be telegraphed to him from New York—"

"Well, man, go on! Where is he?"

"I know nothing about the movements of this ungodly person, but it appears that to-day, for the first time in its history, the quarry up yonder has been robbed. Circumstances lead the manager to suspect that this same gentleman was the perpetrator of the theft, and I am on my way to further the ends of justice."

"No need to be so particular about calling him a gentleman. But what is the 'accident' likely to be?"

"It is feared that the thief may not be aware of the nature of the article he has stolen, and it is very dangerous."

"What on earth is it?"

"It is a fairly large-sized stick of dynamite."

The youth might have been discussing a fancy dance, so suave and polite was he. Jim interrupted rudely.

"Dynamite, is it? Good. If it's old Chatelard, he ought to blow up. Serve him right."

"I'm surprised and pained at your words, my dear friend. No soul is utterly—"

"Yes, it is. Which way did he go? Where is he?"

"I don't know. The manager sent me to inform the sheriff."

"It won't do any good. But you'd better go, all the same."

The judge in chancery went on his dignified way. He would not have hurried if he had heard Angel Gabriel's trump. The news he had brought was in the class to be considered important if true, but there was nothing in it to alter Jimmy's plans. He took the shortest cut to the shore, found a fiat-bottomed punt that was regarded by the village as general property, and pushed off.

The *Sea Gull* was a tidy craft, and looked very gay with even the half of her festival flags on view. But the gaiety did not beguile Jim's dampened spirits. He went aboard feeling that he'd like to rip the idiotic things down; but the yacht, at least, offered a place where he could think. The sunset light on the water blazed vermilion—just the color that Jim all at once discovered he hated. He looked down the companionway, but finally he decided to stretch out on deck for a few minutes' rest. He was very tired.

Off in the stern was a vague mass which proved to be a few yards of canvas carefully tented on the floor. Some gimcrack belonging to the ship's ornamentation had been freshly gilded and left to dry, protected by an old sail-cloth. This, weighted down by a rusty marlinespike, spread couchwise along the taffrail, and offered to Jim just the bed he longed for.

He lay down, face to the sky, and gave himself up to thoughts that were very dark indeed. He had been thrown down, unexpectedly and quite hard, and that was all there was to it. Agatha, lovely but inexplicable maid, was not for him. She had been deceptive—yes, that was the word; and he had been a fool—that was the plain truth. He might as well face it at once. He had been idiot enough to think he might win the girl. Just because they had been tossed together in mid-ocean and she had clung to him. The world wasn't an ocean; it was a spiritual stock-exchange, where he who would win must bid very high indeed for the prizes of life. And he had so little to bid!

Communing thus with his unhappiness, Jim utterly lost the sense of time. The shameless vermilion sunset went into second mourning and thence to nun's gray, before the figure on the sail-cloth moved. Then, through senses only half awake, Jim heard a light sound, like a scratch-scratch on the hull of the yacht. Chamberlain, no doubt, just rubbing the nose of his tender against the *Sea Gull*. Jim was in no hurry to see Chamberlain, and remained where he was. The Englishman would heave in sight soon enough.

But though Jim waited several minutes, with half an eye cocked on the stairway, nobody appeared. The wind was still, the sea like glass; not a sound anywhere. Struck by something of strangeness in the uncanny silence, Jim sat up and called "Ahoy, Chamberlain!" There was no answer. But in the tense stillness there was a sound, and it came from below—the sound of a man's stealthy tread.

Jim sprang to his feet and made the companionway at a bound. He listened an instant to make sure that he heard true, cleared the steps, and landed in the darkness of the ship's saloon. As he groped along, reaching for the door of the principal cabin, the blackness suddenly lighted a little, and a dim shadow shot out and up the stairway. Jim's physical senses were scarcely cognizant of the soft, quick passing, but his thumbs pricked. He dashed after the shadow, up the stairs, out on deck, and aft. There he was—Chatelard, armed, facing his enemy once more, cool but not smiling, desperately at bay. Below him, riding just under the stern of the yacht, was the tender whose scratch-scratch had awakened Jim. A man, oars in hand, was holding the boat close to the *Sea Gull*.

Jim saw all this during the seconds between his turning at the stair-top and his throwing himself plump against the figure by the railing. He was quick enough to pass the range of the weapon, whose shot rang out in the clear air, but he was not quick enough to get under the man's guard. Chatelard was ready for him, holding his weapon high.

As he pressed forward, Jim felt something under his foot. He ducked quickly, as if to dodge Chatelard's hand, and on the downward swing he picked up the rusty marlinespike. It was a weapon of might, indeed. Jim's blow caused Chatelard's arm to drop, limp and nerveless. But in gaining his enemy's weapon, Jim was forced to drop his own. He put a firm foot upon the spike, however, while he held Chatelard at arm's length and looked into his face.

"So we meet once more, after all!" he cried. "And once more I have the pistol." Even as Jim spoke, his adversary made a spring that almost enabled him to seize the weapon again. Jim eluded his clutch, and quick as thought threw the gun overboard. It struck far out on the smooth water.

It was a sorry thing to do, as it proved, for Chatelard, watching his chance, stooped, wrenched the spike from under Jim's foot, and once more stood defiantly at bay. And at this point, he opened his thin lips for one remark.

"You'll go to hell now, you pig of an American!"

"But after you, Monsieur!" Jim cried, and with the words, his arms were about the other in a paralyzing grip.

Had Jim been as strong as when the two men measured forces weeks before, in the fo'cas'le of the *Jeanne D'Arc*, the result might have been different. But the struggle was too long, and Jim's strength insufficient. Chatelard freed himself from his antagonist sufficiently to wield the spike somewhere about Jim's head, and there came over him a sickening consciousness that he was going down. He dropped, hanging like a bulldog to Chatelard's knees, but he knew he had lost the game. He gathered himself momentarily, determined to get on his feet once more, and had almost done it, when sounds of approaching voices mingled with the scuffle of their feet and their quick breathing. Before Jim could see what new thing was happening, Chatelard had turned for one alert instant toward the port side, whence the invading voices came. He was cut off from the stairway, caught in the stern of the yacht, his weapon gone. He gave a quick call in a low voice to the boat below, stepped over the taffrail and then leaped overboard.

Propped up on an elbow, dazed and half blinded, blood flowing down his cheek, Jim stretched forward dizzily, as if to follow his disappearing enemy. He heard the splash of the water, and saw

the rowboat move out from under the stern, but he saw no more. He thought it must have grown very dark.

"Blest if he didn't jump overboard hanging on to that marlinespike!" said Jim stupidly to himself. And then it became quite dark.

When Jimsy regained sight and consciousness, which happened not more than three minutes after he lost them, he found himself supported affectionately against somebody's shoulder, and a voice—the Voice of all voices he most loved—was in his ears.

"Here I am, dear. Do not die! I have come—come to stay, if you want me, James, dearest!" And bending over him was a face—the very Vision of his dream. "Look at me, speak to me, James, dear!"

The voice was a bit hysterical, but the face was eloquent, loving, adoring. It was too good to be true, though Jim was disposed to let the illusion prolong itself as far as possible. He put up his hand and smoothed her face gently, in gratitude at seeing it kind once more. Then he smiled foolishly.

"It's great, isn't it!" he remarked inanely, before thinking it necessary to remove his head. Her face was still the face of tenderness, full of yearning. It did not change. She took a handkerchief from her pocket and carefully pressed it to his cheek and chin. When she took it away, he saw that it was red.

"Lord, what a mess I'm making!" he exclaimed, trying at last to sit up. As he did so, it all came back to him—the flying shadow, the gun, the struggle. He leaned over to peer again through the crossed wires of the deck railing, down into the water. He turned back with an amazed expression.

"*Did* he jump overboard, honest-true, hanging on to that spike?"

Neither Aleck nor Agatha could say, nor yet Mr. Chamberlain, who had been searching the yacht. Wherever it was, the rusty marlinespike had disappeared. The rowboat, too, had gone into the darkness. Jim got up, dazedly thinking for a moment that it was necessary for him to give chase, but he quickly sat down on the sail-cloth again, overcome with faintness and a dark pall before his eyes.

"You are not hurt badly?" The voice was still tender, and it was all for him! As Jim heard it, the pall lifted, and his buoyant spirit came back to its own. He laughed ringingly.

"Lord, no, not hurt. But—"

"But what? What did you wish to say?"

"Is it true? Are you here, by me, to stay?"

For answer she pressed his hand to her lips.

Aleck and Chamberlain, once assured that Jim was safe, went below to make a search, and Jim and Agatha were left together on the sail-cloth. As they sat there, a young moon shone out delicately in the west, and dropped quickly down after the lost sun.

"It's the first moon we've seen together!" said Jim.

"But we've watched the dawn."

"Ah, yes; and such a dawn!"

Little by little, as they sat together, the story of the fight came out. Jim told it bit by bit, not eager. When it was done, Agatha was still puzzled. "Why should he come here? What could he do here?"

"I don't know, though we shall probably find out soon enough. But I don't care, now that you are here."

"James, dear, will you forgive me for this afternoon?"

"I'll forgive you if you'll take it all back, hide, hoofs and horns, for ever 'n ever, amen."

"I take it back. I never meant it."

"Then may one ask why—"

"Oh, James, I don't know why."

Anybody could have told them that it was only a phase of feminine panic in the face of the unknown, necessary as sneezing. But, as Jim said, it didn't matter.

"Never mind. Only I don't want you to marry me because you found me here all bluggy and pitied me."

"James! To talk like that! You know it wasn't—"

"Then, what was it?" Jim, suddenly grown serpent-like in craft, turned his well-known ingenuous and innocent expression upon her.

"The moment you left me, up there in the pine grove, I knew I couldn't do without you."

"How did you know?"

"Because—"

"Yes, because—" Jim prompted her.

"Oh, Jimsy, you know."

"No, I don't."

Agatha, loving his teasing, but too deeply moved, too generous and sincere to play the coquette, turned to him again a face shining with tenderness. Her eyes, like stars; her lips, all sweetness.

"Only love, James, dear—"

Something rose again in Jimmy's soft heart, choking him. As he had thrilled to the unknown ecstasy in Agatha's song, many days before, so now he thrilled to her voice and face, eloquent for him alone. Love and its power, life and its meaning, the long, long thoughts of youth and hope and desire—these held him in thrall. Agatha was in his arms. Time was lost to him, and earth.

EPILOGUE

No one ever knew whether the accomplished Frenchman reached shore, ultimately, in the rowboat, or descended to Sabrina beneath the waves. If that last hasty exit from the deck of the *Sea Gull* was also his final exit from life, certain it is that his departure into the realm of shades was unwept and unsung. The stick of dynamite was found, after a gingerly search, lying on one of the berths in the large cabin, where it had been dropped by the Frenchman in his flight.

Jimmy Hambleton did not let the shoe business entirely go to destruction, though his taste for holidays grew markedly after he brought his bride home with him to Lynn. One year, when the babies were growing up, he ordered a trim little yacht to be built and put into her berth at Charlesport. She was named the *Sea Gull*. Jimmy's chauffeur, called Hand, was her captain.

Sometimes, when James and Agatha were alone, in the zone of stillness that hung over the listening water, there would rise a song, clear and birdlike:

> "Free of my pain, free of my burden of sorrow,
> At last I shall see thee—"

and again Jimmy's heart would rise buoyant, free, happy—the heart of unquenchable youth.

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